This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

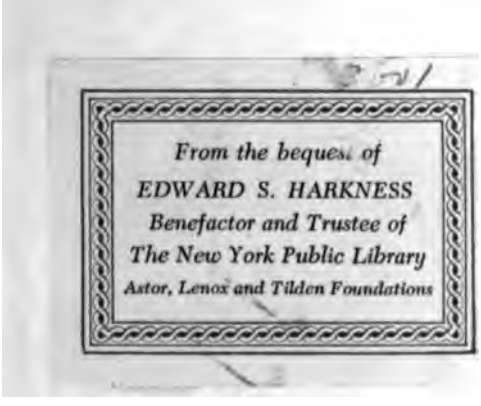
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


From the bequest of
EDWARD S. HARKNESS
Benefactor and Trustee of
The New York Public Library
Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

THE

WORKS

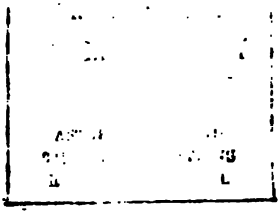
OF

VOLTAIRE.

VOL. XIV.

Being VOL. III. of his

DRAMATIC WORKS.



Frontispiece to the Prodigal Son

THE

DRAMATIC WORKS

OF

Mr. DE VOLTAIRE.

anslated by the Rev. Mr. FRANCKLIN.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

nted for J. NEWBERY, R. BALDWIN, S. CROWDER and Co. J. COOTE, T. DAVIES, W. JOHNSTON, R. FRANCKLIN, and G. KEARSLEY.

M.DCC.LXII.

PUBLIC LIBRARY
590338
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
B 1951 L

This VOLUME contains

A LETTER to her Moſt Serene Highneſs the DUTCHESS of MAINE.

ORESTES. A Tragedy.

PREFACE to the PRODIGAL, a Comedy.

The PRODIGAL. A Comedy.

A LETTER from the Jeſuit TOURNEMINE to Father BRUMOY, on the Tragedy of MEROPE.

A LETTER to the Marquis SCIPIO MAFFEI, Author of the *Italian* MEROPE, and many other celebrated Performances.

A LETTER from Mr. de la LINDELLE to Mr. de VOLTAIRE.

The ANSWER of Mr. de VOLTAIRE to Mr. de la LINDELLE.

A

LETTER

TO

Her Moſt Serene HIGHNESS

THE

DUTCHESS OF MAINE.

MADAM,

YOU have ſeen that noble age, which is at once the model and the reproach of the preſent, and will be ſo of future generations, and have yourſelf made a part of its glory, by your taſte and by your example: thoſe illuſtrious times, when your anceſtors, the *Condés*, crowned with laurels, cultivated the polite arts; when a *Boſſuet* immortaliſed heroes, and inſtructed kings; when a *Fenelon*, the ſecond of mankind in eloquence, and the firſt in the art of making virtue amiable, taught juſtice and humanity

in the moſt charming manner; when *Racine* and *Boileau* preſided over the *Belles-Lettres*, *Lully* over muſic, and *le Brun* over painting; all theſe arts, Madam, met together in your palace: there I had firſt the happineſs, a circumſtance which I ſhall never forget, of hearing, though I was then but a child, that excellent ſcholar, whoſe profound learning never obſcured the brightneſs of his genius, cultivating the fine underſtanding of the *Duke* of *Bourgogne*, the *Duke* of *Maine*, and yourſelf: that happy labour, in which he was ſo powerfully aſſiſted by nature. Sometimes he would take up a *Sophocles* or *Euripides* before you, and tranſlate off hand one of their tragedies. The admiration and enthuſiaſm that poſſeſſed his ſoul, on reading thoſe noble performances, inſpired him with expreſſions that anſwered the manly and harmonious energy of the *Greek*, as nearly as it was poſſible to reach it in the proſe of a language juſt emerging from barbariſm, and which, poliſhed as it now is by ſo many fine authors, is ſtill, notwithſtanding, very deficient in point of force, copiouſneſs, and preciſion. It is impoſſible to convey through any modern language, all the power of *Greek* expreſſions; they deſcribe, with one ſtroke, what coſts us a whole ſentence. *A ſingle* word was ſufficient for them to ex-

preſs

preſs a mountain covered over with trees, bending beneath the weight of their leaves; or, a god throwing his darts at a vaſt diſtance; or, the tops of rocks ſtruck with repeated thunderbolts. That language had not only the advantage of filling the imagination with a word, but every word, we know, had its peculiar melody, which charmed the ear at the ſame time that it diſplay'd the fineſt pictures to the mind; and all *our* tranſlations for this reaſon from the *Greek* poets are weak, dry, and poor: it is imitating palaces of porphyry with bricks and pebbles. *Mr. de Maleſieu* notwithſtanding, by the efforts of a ſudden enthuſiaſm, and a vehement forcible manner of reciting, ſeemed to make up for the poverty of our language, and infuſe into his declamation the very ſoul and ſpirit of the great Athenians. Permit me, Madam, to give you his thoughts with regard to this inventive, ingenious, and ſenſible people, a people from whom the Romans, their conquerors, learned every thing, and who, a long time after the fall of both their empires, had yet the power to raiſe modern Europe from ignorance and barbariſm.

He knew more of Athens than many of our travellers in theſe days do of Rome, after they have ſeen it over and over. That vaſt quantity of ſtatues,

by the greateſt maſters; thoſe pillars which adorned the public market-places; thoſe monuments of taſte and grandeur; that ſuperb and immenſe theatre, built in the fineſt ſituation, between the town and the citadel, where the works of *Sophocles* and *Euripides* were heard by *Pericles* and *Socrates*; and the youth of Athens attended, not ſtanding up, or in perpetual riot and confuſion, as they do with us: in a word, every thing which the Athenians had done in every art and every branch of knowledge, was ever preſent to the mind of Mr. *de Maleſieu*. He was far from falling in with the opinions of thoſe ridiculouſly rigid critics, and falſe politicians, who blame the Athenians for having been too ſumptuous in their public entertainments, and do not know that this very magnificence greatly enriched Athens, by attracting crouds of foreigners, who came from all parts to admire, and to receive leſſons from them on eloquence and virtue.

This extenſive and almoſt univerſal genius was engaged by you, Madam, to tranſlate the *Iphigenia* in *Tauris* of *Euripides*; a taſk which he executed with equal elegance, ſtrength, and fidelity. It was repreſented at an entertainment which he had the *honour to preſent* to your Highneſs, an entertainment

worthy

worthy of him who gave, and of her who received it. You, I remember, Madam, play'd the part of *Iphigenia*, for I was present at the representation; and as at that time I had no acquaintance with the French stage, it never enter'd into my head that gallantry cou'd ever have been mingled with so tragical a subject. I gave myself up to the manners and customs of Greece, perhaps the more easily, because I was then acquainted with no other. I admired the *antique* in all its noble simplicity: it was this which first suggested to me the idea of writing my tragedy of *Oedipus*, without ever having read *Corneille's*. I begun, as an essay of my abilities, by translating that famous scene from *Sophocles*, of the double confidence of *Jocasta* and *Oedipus*. I read it to some of my friends, who frequented the theatre, and to two or three actors: they assur'd me it wou'd never succeed on the French stage, and advis'd me to read *Corneille*, who had carefully avoided that part of the plot, and all agreed, that if I did not follow his example, by putting in a love intrigue, the players wou'd never undertake it. I then read the *Oedipus* of *Corneille*, which, though it was not rank'd with *Cinna* and *Polyeucte*, had, notwithstanding, met with some applause. I must confess, their opinions ran directly counter to mine, from the beginning of this affair to the

end; but I was forc'd to ſubmit to example, and the evil power of faſhion. In the mid'ſt of all the terror of this maſter-piece of antiquity, I brought in, not abſolutely a love intrigue, but the * remembrance of an extinguiſh'd paſſion, which appear'd to the laſt degree abſurd; but I will not repeat here what I have already ſaid on this ſubject.

Your highneſs may remember, I had the honour of reading my *Oedipus* to you; the ſcene from *Sophocles* was not condemn'd at that tribunal; for both yourſelf, the *Cardinal de Polignac*, Mr de *Maleſieu*, and your whole court, unanimouſly condemn'd me, and with great reaſon, for having ſo much as mention'd the word love in a work which *Sophocles* finiſh'd ſo completely, and ſo ſucceſsfully, without that unhappy foreign ornament; and yet the very fault which you blamed me for, was the only thing that recommended my performance to the ſtage. The players were, with the greateſt difficulty, prevail'd on to perform my *Oedipus*, which they imagin'd cou'd never ſucceed: the public, however, were intirely of your opinion; every

* Voltaire here alludes to the part of *Philoctetes* in his *Oedipus*. See the play, and the preface to it, in the firſt Vol. of the Dramatic works.

part.

part of it that was written in the taſte of *Sophocles* was generally applauded, and the love ſcenes condemn'd by the moſt judicious critics: to ſay the truth, Madam, whilſt parricide and inceſt are deſtroying a family, and a plague laying the whole country waſte, is it a ſeaſon for love and gallantry? There cannot, perhaps, be two more ſtriking proofs of theatrical abſurdity, and the power of habit, than *Corneille*, on one ſide, making *Theſeus* cry out,

* Quelque ravage affreux qu'etale ici la peſte,
L'abſence aux vrais amanſeſt encor plus funeſte.

And on the other, myſelf, ſixty years after him, making old *Jocaſta* talk of her old love; and all this only in compliance with a taſte the moſt falſe and ridiculous that ever corrupted literature.

That a *Phædra*, whoſe character is, perhaps, the moſt truly theatrical that ever was exibited, and almoſt the only perſon whom antiquity hath repreſented in love, that ſhe ſhou'd expreſs all the power and fury of

---

* The literal tranſlation of which is "whatever dreadful "havoc the plague may make here, abſence to thoſe who truly "love is much more dreadful." There is a great deal of ſuch nonſenſe in Dryden's and ſome other of our tragedies, but it wou'd not go down in the preſent age.

that fatal paſſion: that a *Roxana*, confin'd within the walls of an idle ſeraglio, ſhou'd abandon herſelf to love and jealouſy: that *Ariadne* ſhou'd complain to heaven and earth of cruelty and inconſtancy: that *Oroſmane* ſhou'd deſtroy a miſtreſs whom he ador'd: all this is truly tragic: love, either raging, or criminal, or unhappy, or attended with remorſe, draws ſuch tears from us as we need not bluſh to ſhed; but there is no medium: love ſhou'd either command as a tyrant, or not appear at all; he can never act an under part: but that *Nero* ſhou'd hide himſelf behind the tapeſtry to overhear the converſation of his miſtreſs and his rival: that old *Mithridates* ſhou'd make uſe of a comedy trick to diſcover the ſecret of a young woman belov'd by his two ſons: that *Maximus*, even in *Cinna*, a piece of ſo much real merit, ſhou'd act the part of a villain, and diſcover ſo important a conſpiracy, only becauſe he was weak enough to be in love with a woman whoſe paſſion for *Cinna* he muſt have known, and alledge by way of reaſon, that

† Love excuſes all,
For the true lover knows no friends ——

† The Original is,

" l' amour rend tout permis,
" Un veritable amant ne connoit point d'amis."

that

that old *Sertorius* ſhou'd fall in love with a ſtrange Spaniſh lady, call'd *Viriate*, and be aſſaſſinated by his rival *Perpenna*; all this, we will be bold enough to aſſert, is little mean, and puerile: ſuch ridiculous ſtuff wou'd degrade us infinitely below the Athenians, if our great maſters had not made amends for theſe faults, which are merely national, by thoſe ſublime beauties which are intirely the product of their own genius.

It is indeed aſtoniſhing to me, that the great tragic poets of Athens ſhou'd dwell ſo much on thoſe ſubjects where nature diſplays every thing that is great and affecting; an *Electra*, an *Iphigenia*, a *Merope*, an *Alcmeon*: and that our illuſtrious moderns, neglecting all theſe, ſhou'd ſcarce treat of any thing but love, which is generally much more proper for comedy than tragedy: ſometimes indeed they have endeavour'd to enrich and adorn it by politicks; but that love which is not violent is always cold, and all political intrigues that do not riſe to the heighth and fury of ambition are ſtill more cold and inſipid: political reaſonings and debates are very agreeable in *Polybius* or *Machiavel*; gallantry is very fit for tales, or comedies; but nothing like this is ſuitable to the grandeur and pathos of true tragedy.

A taſte for gallantry in our tragedies was carry'd to ſuch a ridiculous exceſs, that a great princeſs, whoſe high rank and fine underſtanding might in ſome meaſure excuſe her believing that all the world wou'd be of her opinion, imagin'd, that the parting of *Titus* and *Berenice* was an excellent ſubject for a tragedy: ſhe therefore put it into the hands of * two of our beſt writers; neither of them had ever produc'd a performance wherein love had not play'd the principal or at leaſt the ſecond part; but one of them had never touch'd the heart, except in thoſe ſcenes of the *Cid* which he had taken from the Spaniſh: the other, always tender and elegant, endow'd with every ſpecies of eloquence, and above all, maſter of that enchanting art which draws forth the moſt delicate ſentiments from the leaſt and moſt unpromiſing incidents: one therefore made of *Titus* and *Berenice* as contemptible a piece as ever appear'd on the ſtage; the other found out the ſecret of intereſting the ſpectator for five acts without any other foundation but theſe words, *I love you, and I leave you.* It was indeed nothing more than a paſtoral,

* The French expreſſion is "deux maitres de laſcene, i. e. "two maſters of the ſcene." Corneille and Racine, the latter of whom Voltaire takes every occaſion of preferring to the former, though he frequently cenſures both with great freedom, and generally with equal juſtice.

between

between an emperor, a king, and a queen; and a paſtoral withal infinitely leſs tragical than the intereſting ſcenes of *Paſtor Fido*. The ſucceſs of this, however, perſuaded the puplic, and the poets, that love, and love alone, was the ſoul of tragedy.

It was not till long after, when he was further advanc'd in life, that this great poet found out that he was capable of ſomething ſuperior to this: when he was ſorry he had enervated the drama by ſo many declarations of love, and ſentiments of jealouſy, and coquettry, much worthier, as I have already ventur'd to aſſert, of Menander, than of Sophocles and Euripides. Then he wrote his maſter-piece, Athaliah; but though he was undeceiv'd himſelf, the public was *not*: they cou'd not bring themſelves to conceive, that a woman, a child, and a prieſt, cou'd make an intereſting tragedy: a work that approach'd nearer to perfection than any which ever came from the hand of man, remain'd for a long time in contempt, and its illuſtrious author had to his laſt hour the mortification of ſeeing the age he liv'd in, though greatly improv'd, ſtill ſo corrupted with bad taſte, as never to do juſtice to his nobleſt performance.

It is certain, if this great man had liv'd, and cultivated thoſe talents which alone made his fortune and his fame,

ſame, and which therefore he ſhou'd not have deſerted, he wou'd have reſtor'd to the theatre its ancient purity, and no more have degraded the great ſubjects of antiquity with love intrigue. He had begun an *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and there was not a word of gallantry in his whole plan: he wou'd never have made *Agamemnon, Oreſtes, Electra, Telephus, or Ajax*, in love: but having unhappily quitted the ſtage before he had reform'd it, all thoſe who followed him imitated, and even added to his faults, without copying any of his beauties. The morality of *Quinault's* operas was brought into almoſt every tragic ſcene: ſometimes it is an *Alcibiades* who aſſures us, that *in thoſe tender moments he has always prov'd by experience, that a mortal may taſte of perfect happineſs*: ſometimes it is an *Ameſtris* who tells us, that the daughter of a great king burns with a ſecret flame without *ſhame, and without fear*: in another, *Agnonis follows the ſteps of the fair Criſis in every place, the conſtant adorer of her divine charms*; the fierce *Arminius*, the defender of *Germany*, proteſts to us, that *he comes to read his fate in the eyes of Iſmenia*, and goes to the camp of *Varus*, to ſee if — *the fair eyes of his Iſmenia will ſhew him their wonted tenderneſs*. — In *Amaſis*, which is only *Merope*, crouded with a heap of romantic epiſodes, the heroine, who, three days before,

at

at a country houſe, had juſt got ſight of a young ſtranger, and fall'n in love with him, cries out, with a great deal of regard to decency and decorum, — *This is the ſame ſtranger, alaſs! he hath not conceal'd himſelf ſo much as he ought, for my repoſe: for the few moments when he chanc'd to ſtrike my eyes I ſaw him and bluſh'd, my ſoul was deeply mov'd at him.* — *In Athenais*, a prince of Perſia diſguiſes himſelf, in order to make his miſtreſs a viſit at the court of a Roman emperor: we fancy, in ſhort, that we are reading the romances of Mademoiſelle *Scuderi*, who deſcrib'dt he citizens of Paris under the names of the heroes of antiquity.

To confirm and eſtabliſh this horrid taſte amongſt us, which renders us ſo ridiculous in the eyes of all ſenſible foreigners, it unfortunately happen'd, that Mr. de *Longepierre*, a warm admirer of antiquity, but not ſufficiently acquainted with our ſtage, and who beſides was careleſs in his verſification, gave us his *Electra*. We muſt confeſs it was written in the taſte of the antients, no cold ill-placed intrigue diſfigur'd this ſubject full of terror: the piece was ſimple, and without any epiſode. This procured for it, and with great reaſon, the patronage of ſo many perſons of the firſt conſideration, who flatter'd themſelves that this valuable ſimplicity, which conſtituted the principle merit of the

great

great geniuſſes of Athens, wou'd be well receiv'd at Paris, were it had been ſo long neglected. You, Madam, with the late princeſs of *Conti*, were at the head of thoſe ſanguine friends; but, unhappily, the faults of the French piece were ſo numerous, in compariſon with the beauties which he had borrow'd from the *Greek*, that you yourſelf acknowledg'd, at the repreſentation, it was a ſtatue of *Praxteles* diſfigur'd by a modern artiſt. You had reſolution enough to give up a thing which was not in reality worthy of being ſupported, well knowing, that favor and protection, thrown away on bad performances, is as prejudical to the advancement of wit and good ſenſe, as the unjuſt cenſure of real merit; but the downfall of *Electra* was a terrible ſtroke on the partiſans of antiquity. The critics avail'd themſelves of the faults of the copy, the better to decry the merit of the original; and to complete the corruption of our taſte, we perſuaded ourſelves it was impoſſible to ſupport, without love and romance, thoſe ſubjects which the Greeks had never debaſed by ſuch epiſodes: it was pretended that we might admire the Greek tragedians in the reading, but that it was impoſſible to imitate them without being condemn'd by our own age and nation; ſtrange contradic-

tion!

tion! for, ſurely, if the reading really pleas'd us, how cou'd the repreſentation diſpleaſe?

We ſhou'd not, I acknowledge, endeavour to imitate what is weak and defective in the antients: it is moſt probable that their faults were very well known to their cotemporaries. I am ſatisfy'd, Madam, that the wits of Athens condemn'd, as well as you, ſome of thoſe repetitions, and ſome declamations with which *Sophocles* has loaded his *Electra*: they muſt have obſerv'd that he had not dived deep enough into the human heart. I will moreover fairly confeſs, that there are beauties peculiar not only to the Greek language, but to the climate, to manners and times, which it wou'd be ridiculous to tranſplant hither. I have not copy'd exactly therefore the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, much more I knew wou'd be neceſſary; but I have taken, as well as I cou'd, all the ſpirit and ſubſtance of it. The feaſt celebrated by *Ægiſthus* and *Clytemnæſtra*, which they call'd the feaſt of *Agamemnon*; the arrival of *Oreſtes* and *Pylades*; the urn which was ſuppos'd to contain the aſhes of *Oreſtes*; the ring of *Agamemnon*; the character of *Electra*, and that of *Iphiſa*, which is exactly the *Chryſothemis* of *Sophocles*; and above all, the remorſe of *Clytemnæſtra*; theſe I have copy'd from the Greek tragedy. When the meſſenger, who relates the fictitious

fictitious ſtory of the death of *Oreſtes*, ſays to *Clytemneſtra*, "*I ſee, Madam, you are deeply affected at his death*;" ſhe replies, "*I am a mother, and muſt therefore be unhappy; a mother, though injur'd, cannot hate her own offspring*:" ſhe even endeavours to juſtify herſelf to *Electra*, with regard to the murther of *Agamemnon*, and laments her daughter. *Euripides* has carry'd *Clytemneſtra's* repentance ſtill further. This, Madam, was what gain'd the applauſe of the moſt judicious and ſenſible people upon earth, and was approv'd by all good judges in our own nation. No character, in reality, can be more natural than that of a woman, criminal with regard to her huſband, yet ſoften'd by her children; a woman, whoſe proud and fiery diſpoſition is ſtill open to pity and compaſſion, who reſumes the fierceneſs of her character on receiving too ſevere reproaches, and at laſt ſinks into ſubmiſſion and tears. The ſeeds of this character were in *Sophocles* and *Euripides*, and I have only unfolded them. Nothing but ignorance, and its natural attendant, preſumption, can aſſert, that the antients have nothing worthy of our imitation: there is ſcarce one real and eſſential beauty and perfection, for the foundation of which, at leaſt, we are not indebted to them.

I have

I have taken particular care not to depart from that ſimplicity ſo ſtrongly recommended by the Greeks, and ſo difficult to attain, the true mark of genius and invention; and the very eſſence of all theatical merit. A foreign character, brought into *Oedipus* or *Electra*, who ſhou'd play a principal part, and draw aſide the attention of the audience, wou'd be a monſter in the eyes of all thoſe who have any knowledge of the antients, or of that nature which they have ſo finely painted. Art and genius conſiſt in finding every thing within the ſubject, and never going out of it in ſearch of additional ornaments: but how are we to imitate that truly tragic pomp and magnificence which we find in the verſes of Sophocles, that natural elegance and purity of diction, without which the piece, how well ſoever conducted in other reſpects, muſt after all be but a poor performance!

I have at leaſt given my countrymen ſome idea of a tragedy without love, without confidants, and without epiſodes: the few partiſans of good taſte acknowledge themſelves oblig'd to me for it, tho' the reſt of the world withold their approbation for a time, but will come in at laſt, when the rage of party is over, the injuſtice of perſecution at an end, and the clouds of ignorance diſſipated. You, Madam, muſt preſerve amongſt us thoſe glittering ſparks of light which the antients have

tranſmitted

tranſmitted to us; we owe every thing to them: not an art was born amongſt us; every thing was tranſplanted: but the earth that bears theſe foreign fruits is worn out, and our antient barbariſm, by the help of falſe taſte, wou'd break out again in ſpite of all our culture and improvement: and the diſciples of Athens and Rome become Goths and Vandals, corrupted with the manners of the Sibarites, without the kind favor and protection of perſons of your rank. When nature hath given them either genius, or the love of genius, they encourage this nation, which is better able to imitate than to invent; and which always looks up towards the great for thoſe inſtructions and examples which it perpetually ſtands in need of. All that I wiſh for, Madam, is, that ſome genius may be found to finiſh what I have but juſt ſketch'd out; to free the ſtage from that effeminacy and affectation which it is now ſunk into; to render it reſpectable to the graveſt characters; worthy of the few great maſter pieces which we already have amongſt us; worthy, in ſhort, the approbation of a mind like yours, and all thoſe who may hereafter endeavor to reſemble you.

ORESTES.

A

TRAGEDY.

Repreſented in 1750.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ORESTES, Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnæstra.
ELECTRA, } Sisters of Oreſtes
IPHISA, }
CLYTEMNÆSTRA, Wife of Ægiſthus.
PYLADES, Friend of Oreſtes.
PAMMENES, an old Man, attach'd to the Family of Agamemnon.
DEMAS, an Officer of the Guards.
ATTENDANTS.

SCENE, the ſea-ſhore, a wood, a temple, a palace and a tomb, on one ſide: on the other, Argos at a diſtance.

ORESTES

ORESTES.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

IPHISA, PAMMENES.

IPHISA.

SAy'ſt thou, Pammenes? ſhall theſe hated walls,
Where I ſo long have dragg'd a life of woe,
Afford at leaſt the melancholy comfort
Of mingling ſorrows with my dear Electra?
And will Ægiſthus bring her to the tomb
Of Agamemnon, bring his daughter here,
To be a witneſs of the horrid pomp,
The ſad ſolemnity, which on this day
Annual returns, to celebrate their crimes,
And *make their guilt* immortal?

PAMMENE

PAMMENES.

O Iphiſa,
Thou honour'd daughter of my royal maſter,
Like thee, confin'd within theſe lonely walls,
The ſecrets of a vile abandon'd court,
Do ſeldom reach Pammenes; but, 'tis rumour'd,
The jealous tyrant brings Electra here,
Fearful leaſt Argos, by her cries alarm'd,
Shou'd riſe to vengeance; ev'ry heart, he knows,
Feels for the injur'd princeſs, therefore much
He dreads her clamours; with a watchful eye
Obſerves her conduct, treats her as a ſlave,
And leads the captive to adorn his triumph.

IPHISA.

Good heav'n! and muſt Electra be a ſlave!
Shall Agamemnon's blood be thus diſgrac'd
By a barbarian? Will her cruel mother,
Will Clytemnæſtra bear the vile reproach
That on herſelf recoils, and all her race?
Perhaps my ſiſter is too fierce of ſoul,
She mingles too much pride and bitterneſs
Of keen reſentment with her griefs; alaſs!
Weak are her arms againſt a tyrant's pow'r:
What will her anger, what her pride avail her?
They only irritate a haughty foe,

An

And cannot ſerve our cauſe: my fate at leaſt
Is milder, and this ſolitary ſtate
Shields me from wrongs which muſt oppreſs Electra.
Far from my father's foes, theſe pious hands
Can pay due off'rings to his honour'd ſhade:
Far from his murth'rer, in this ſad retreat
Freely I weep in peace, and curſe Ægiſthus:
I'm not condemn'd to ſee the tyrant here,
Save when the Sun unwillingly brings round
The fatal day that knit the dreadful tie,
When that inhuman monſter ſhed the blood
Of Agamemnon, when baſe Clytemnæſtra ——

SCENE II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PAMMENES.

IPHISA.

O my Electra! art thou here? my ſiſter —

ELECTRA.

The day of horror is return'd, Iphiſa:
The dreadful rites, the guilty feaſt prepar'd,
Have brought me hither; thy Electra comes,
Thy captive ſiſter, comes a wretched ſlave,
To bear the tidings of their guilty joy.

IPHISA.

IPHISA.

To ſee Electra is a bleſſing ſtill,
It pours ſome joy into the bitter cup
Of ſorrow, thus to mix my tears with thine.

ELECTRA.

Tears, my Iphiſa! I have ſhed enough
Of them already: O thou bleeding ghoſt
Of my dead father, ever-honour'd ſhade,
Is that the tribute which I owe to thee?
I owe thee blood, and blood thou haſt requir'd:
Amid'ſt the pomp of this dire feſtival,
Dragg'd by Ægiſthus here, I will collect
My ſcatter'd ſpirits, ſhake off theſe vile chains,
And be my own avenger: yes, Iphiſa,
This feeble arm ſhall reach the tyrant's heart:
Did not the cruel Clytemnæſtra ſhed
A huſband's blood? did I not ſee her lift
Her barb'rous hand againſt him, and ſhall we
Suſpend the blow, and let a murth'rer live?
O vengeance, and thou, animating virtue,
That doſt inſpire me, art thou not as bold
As daring guilt? we muſt revenge ourſelves,
We muſt, Iphiſa: fear'ſt thou then to ſtrike,
Fearſt thou to die? ſhall Clytemnæſtra's daughter,

Th

The blood of Atreus fear? O rather lend
Thy aid, and join the deſperate Electra.

IPHISA.

My deareſt ſiſter, moderate thy rage,
And calm thy troubled mind: againſt our foes
What can we bring but unavailing tears?
Who will aſſiſt us? who will lend us arms?
Or how ſhall we ſurpriſe a watchful king,
For guilt is ever fearful, by his guards
Surrounded? why, Electra, wilt thou court
Perpetual danger? ſhou'd the tyrant hear
Thy loud complaints, I tremble for thy life.

ELECTRA.

Why let him hear them: I wou'd have my grief
Sink to his heart, and poiſon all his joys:
Yes; I wou'd have my cries aſcend to heav'n,
And bring the thunder down; wou'd have them raiſe
A hundred kings, who never yet have dar'd,
Unworthy cowards as they are, t' avenge
Great Agamemnon: but I pardon thee,
And the vain terrors of thy fearful ſoul,
That ſhrinks at danger; for he favours you,
I know he does, and only cruſhes me
Beneath his iron yoke: thou haſt not been,

Like me, a wretched perſecuted ſlave;
Thou did'ſt not ſee the impious parricide,
The horrid * feaſt, the dire ſolemnity,
When Clytemnæſtra — O the dreadful image
Is ſtill before me, in this place, Iphiſa,
Where now thou trembleſt to declare thy wrongs,
There did theſe eyes behold our hapleſs father
Caught in the deadly ſnare: Pammenes heard
His dying groans, and ran with me to ſave him:
But when I came, what did I ſee! my mother
Plunging her ruthleſs dagger in his breaſt,
To rob him of the poor remains of life.

[Turning to Pammenes.

Thou ſaw'ſt me take Oreſtes in my arms,
My dear Oreſtes; little knew he then
Of danger, but as near his murther'd father
He ſtood, call'd out for aid to Clytemnæſtra:
She, midſt the horrors of the guilty ſcene,
Stopp'd for a moment ſhort, and gave us time
Safe to convey the victim from Ægiſthus.

---

* Nothing cou'd add more to the horror of the crime than ſuch a circumſtance. Clytemnæſtra, not content with murthering her huſband, inſtituted a ſolemn feaſt in commemoration of the happy event, and call'd it, with cruel raillery, the ſupper of Agamemnon. Dinias, in his hiſtory of Argos, informs us, it was on the 13th of the month Gamelion, which anſwers to the beginning of our January.

Whether

Whether the tyrant has completed yet
Th' imperfect vengeance in Oreſtes' blood,
I know not: O my brother, doſt thou live,
Or haſt thou follow'd thy unhappy father?
Alas! I weep for him, and fear for thee.
Theſe hands are loaded with inglorious chains,
And theſe ſad eyes, for ever bath'd in tears,
See nought but guilt, oppreſſion, and deſpair.

PAMMENES.

Ye dear remains of Atreus' honour'd race,
Whoſe ſplendor I have ſeen, whoſe woes I feel,
Permit a friend to fill your weeping ſouls
With chearful hope, that ever waits propitious
To ſooth affliction: call to mind what heav'n
Long ſince hath promis'd, that its vengeful hand
Shou'd one day lead Oreſtes to the place
Where we preſerv'd him; that Ægiſthus there,
Ev'n at yon tomb, and on the fatal day
Mark'd for his impious triumph o'er the dead,
Shou'd pay the forfeit of his crime: the Gods
Can ne'er deceive; in darkneſs ſtill they veil
Their ſecret purpoſe from the eyes of men,
And puniſhment with ſlow but certain ſteps,
Still follows guilt.

IPHISA.

But wherefore ſtays ſo long
Their tardy vengeance? I have languiſh'd here
In grief and anguiſh many a tedious hour;
Electra, ſtill more wretched, is in chains:
Mean time the proud oppreſſor lives in peace,
And glory's in his crimes.

ELECTRA.

Thou ſeeſt, Pammenes,
Ægiſthus ſtill renews his cruel triumph,
And celebrates the fatal nuptials; ſtill
A wretched exile lives my dear Oreſtes,
Forgetful of his father, and Electra.

PAMMENES.

But mark the courſe of time: he touches now
The age when manly ſtrength, with courage join'd,
May aid your purpoſe; hope for his return,
And truſt on heav'n.

ELECTRA.

We will: thou ſon of wiſdom,
Thou good old man, O thou haſt darted forth
A ray of hope on my deſpairing ſoul.
If with unpitying eye the gods beheld
Our mis'ries here, and proud oppreſſion, ſtill
Unpuniſh'd,

Unpuniſh'd, trampled on the tender feet
Of innocence, what hand wou'd crown their altars
With incenſe and oblation! but kind heav'n
Will give Oreſtes to a ſiſter's tears,
And blaſt the tyrant: hear my voice, Oreſtes,
O hear thy country's, hear the cries of blood,
That call thee forth; come from thy dreary caves,
And pathleſs deſarts, where misfortune long
Hath try'd thy courage; leave thy ſavage prey,
And all the roaming monſters of the foreſt,
To chace the beaſts of Argos, to deſtroy
The tyrants of the earth, the murtherers
Of kings; O haſte, and let me guide thy hand
Ev'n to the traitor's breaſt.

IPHISA.

No more: repreſs
Thy griefs, Electra, ſee thy mother comes.

ELECTRA.

And have I yet a mother?

SCENE III.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA.

CLYSTEMNÆSTRA.

Hence, and leave me;
You may retire, Pammenes; ſtay, my daughters.

IPHISA.

Alas! that ſacred name diſpels my fears.

ELECTRA.

And doubles mine.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Touching your fate, my children,
I came to lay a mother's heart before you.
Barren, thank heav'n, hath been my ſecond bed,
Nor brought a race of jealous foes to ſow
Diviſion here. Alas! my little race
Is almoſt run; the ſecret grief that long
Hath prey'd on my ſad heart will finiſh ſoon
A life of woe: ſpite of Ægiſthus, ſtill
I love my children; ſpite of all his rage,
Electra, thou who in thy infant years
So oft haſt giv'n me comfort, when the loſs
Of Iphigenia, and her cruel father
Oppreſs'd my ſoul; tho' now thy pride diſdains me,
And braves my pow'r, thou art my daughter ſtill;
Unworthy as thou art, there's ſtill a place
In Clytemnæſtra's heart for her Electra.

ELECTRA.

For me! O heav'n, and am I yet belov'd;
And doſt thou feel for thy unhappy daughter?

O,

O, if thou doſt, behold her chains, behold
Yon tomb ——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Unkind Electra, thus to wake
The ſad remembrance! thou haſt plung'd a dagger
Into thy mother's breaſt: but I deſerve it.

ELECTRA.

Thou haſt diſarm'd Electra, nature pleads
A mother's cauſe; I own myſelf to blame
For all the bitterneſs of ſorrow pour'd
In dreadful execrations on thy head.
By thee deliver'd to the tyrant's pow'r,
I wou'd have torn thee from him; I lament,
But cannot hate thee. O, if gracious heav'n
Hath touch'd thy ſoul with wholeſome penitence,
Obey its ſacred will, and hear the voice
Of conſcience, that commands thee to unlooſe
The horrid ties that bind thee to a wretch
Deſpis'd and hated; follow the great God
Who leads thy footſteps to the paths of virtue;
Call back your ſon, let him return to fill
The throne of his great anceſtors, to ſcourge
A tyrant, to revenge his murther'd father,
His ſiſters, and his mother: haſte and ſend
For my Oreſtes.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Talk no more of that,
Electra, nor ſpeak thus of my Ægiſthus:
I grieve to ſee thee in theſe ſhameful bonds;
But know, a ſov'reign cannot tamely brook
Repeated inſults, or embrace a foe:
You had provok'd him to be cruel; I,
Who am but his firſt ſubject, oft have try'd
To ſooth his anger, but in vain; my words,
Inſtead of healing, but inflam'd the wound:
Electra is indebted to herſelf
For all her deep-felt inj'ries; henceforth bend
To thy condition; let thy ſiſter teach thee
That we muſt yield ſubmiſſive to our fate,
If e'er we hope to change it. I cou'd wiſh
To end my days in peace amongſt my children;
But if thy rapid and imprudent zeal
Should bring Oreſtes here before the time,
His life might anſwer for it, and thy own,
If the king ſee him: though I pity thee,
Electra, yet I owe a huſband more
Than a loſt ſon, whom I have cauſe to fear.

ELECTRA.

O heav'n, that monſter! he thy huſband, he!
And is it thus thou pity'ſt me? alas,

What

What will this poor, this light remorſe avail thee,
This fleeting ſorrow, was thy tenderneſs
But for a moment, doſt thou threaten me,
[To Iphiſa.
Is this, Iphiſa, this a mother's love?
[To Clytemnæſtra.
It ſeems you threaten my Oreſtes too;
You have no cauſe to fear, nor I to hope
For him: alas! perhaps he is no more;
Perhaps Ægiſthus, the deteſted tyrant,
He whom but now thou didſt not bluſh to call
Thy huſband, hath in ſecret ta'en his life.

IPHISA.

Believe me, Madam, when I call the gods
To witneſs, poor Electra and myſelf
Are ſtrangers to the fate of dear Oreſtes;
Have pity then on your afflicted daughters,
Pity your hapleſs ſon, and ſpare Electra,
She has been wrong'd; her tears and her reproaches
Suit well her fate, and ought to be forgiv'n.

ELECTRA.

I muſt not hope it, muſt not ev'n complain;
And if Oreſtes lives but in my thoughts
'Tis deem'd a crime. I know Ægiſthus well,
Know his fierce nature, if he fears my brother,
He'll ſoon deſtroy him.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Know, thy brother lives;
If he's in danger, 'tis from thy imprudence;
Therefore be humble, moderate thy tranſports,
Reſpect thy mother: think'ſt thou I come here,
Elate with joy, to lead the ſplendid triumph?
O no, to me it is a day of ſorrow;
Thou weep'ſt in chains, and I upon a throne.
I know the cruel vows thy hatred made
Againſt me: O, Electra! ceaſe thy pray'rs,
The gods have heard thee but too well already:
Retire, and leave me.

SCENE IV.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA alone.

How it ſhocks my ſoul
To ſee my children! O the guilty bed!
My fatal marriage, and long proſp'rous crimes,
Adultery and murder, horrid bonds!
How ye torment me now! my little dream
Of happineſs is o'er, and conſcience darts
Its ſudden rays on my affrighted ſoul.
How can Ægiſthus live ſo long in peace!
Fearleſs he leads me on to ſhare with him
Theſe cruel triumphs; but my ſpirits fail,

My

My ſtrength forſakes me, and I tremble now
At ev'ry omen, fear my ſubjects, fear
All Argos, Greece, Electra, and Oreſtes.
How dreadful 'tis to hate the blood that flow'd
Congenial with our own, to dread the names
Which mortals hold ſo ſacred and ſo dear!
But injur'd nature, baniſh'd from my heart,
Indignant frowns, and to avenge herſelf
Now bids me tremble at the name of ſon.

SCENE V.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Cruel Ægiſthus, wherefore wou'd'ſt thou lead me
To this ſad place, the ſeat of death and horror?

ÆGISTHUS.

Is then the ſolemn pomp, the feaſt of joy,
The ſweet remembrance of our proſp'rous days,
Grown hateful to thee, is our marriage day
A day of horror?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

No: but here, Ægiſthus,
There may be danger: my unhappy children
Have fill'd this heart with anguiſh: poor Iphiſa

Weeps

Weeps her hard lot; Electra is in chains;
This fatal place reminds me of the blood
We ſhed, reminds me of my dear Oreſtes,
Of Agamemnon.

ÆGISTHUS.

Let Iphiſa weep,
And proud Electra rave; I bore too long
Her bitter taunts, 'tis fit her haughtineſs
Shou'd now be humbled; I'll not ſuffer her
To ſtir up foul rebellion in my kingdom,
To tell the factious that Oreſtes comes,
And call down vengeance on me; every hour
That hated name is eccho'd in my ear,
I muſt not bear it.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Ha! what name was that?
Oreſtes! O, I ſhudder at the thought
Of his approach: an oracle long ſince
Declar'd, that here, ev'n at the fatal tomb
Whither thou lead'ſt, his parricidal hand
Shou'd one day riſe vindictive, and deſtroy us.
Why therefore wou'd'ſt thou tempt the gods, why thus
Expoſe a life ſo dear to Clytemnæſtra?

ÆGISTHUS.

Be not alarm'd; Oreſtes ne'er ſhall hurt thee:

His

His be the danger; for I have ſent forth
Some friends in ſearch of him, and ſoon I hope
Shall ſee him in the toils; a wretched exile
From clime to clime he roams, and now it ſeems
In Epidaurus' gloomy foreſt hides
His ignominious head; but there perhaps
We have more friends than Clytemnæſtra thinks of;
The king may ſerve us.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But, my ſon ——

ÆGISTHUS.

I know
He's fierce, implacable, revengeful; ſtung
By his misfortunes, all the blood of Atreus
Boils in his breaſt, and animates his rage.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas! my Lord, his rage is but too juſt.

ÆGISTHUS.

Be it our buſ'neſs then to make it vain;
Thou know'ſt I've ſent my Pliſthenes in ſecret
To Epidaurus.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But for what?

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

To fix
My thone in ſafety, and remove thy fears:
Yes, Pliſthenes, my ſon, by thee adopted
Heir to my kingdom, knows too well how much
His int'reſt muſt depend on the event
E'er to neglect his charge: he is thy ſon,
Think of no other: had Electra's heart
Submiſſive yielded to another's counſels,
She had been happy in my Pliſthenes:
But ſhe ſhall feel the pow'r which ſhe contemns,
She and her haughty brother, her Oreſtes,
He may be found perhaps.——You ſeem diſturb'd.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas! Ægiſthus, muſt we ſacrifice
More victims? muſt I purchaſe length of days
With added guilt? Thou know'ſt whoſe blood we
ſhed——
And muſt my ſon too periſh, muſt I pay
So dear a price for life?

ÆGISTHUS.

Remember——

CLYTEM-

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

No:
First let me ask the sacred oracle——

ÆGISTHUS.

What canst thou hope from gods or oracles,
Were they consulted on the blissful day
That gave Ægisthus to his Clytemnæstra?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Thou ha'st recall'd a time when heav'n, I fear,
Was much offended: love defies the gods,
But fear adores them; guilt weighs down my soul,
Do not oppress my feeble spirits; time,
That changes all, hath alter'd this proud heart;
The hand of heav'n is on me, and subdues
The haughty rage that once inspir'd my breast;
Not that my tender friendship for Ægisthus
Can e'er decay, our int'rests are the same;
But to behold my daughter made a slave,
To think on my poor lost abandon'd son,
To think that now, ev'n now, perhaps he dies
By vile assassins, or, if living, lives
My foe, and hates the guilty Clytemnæstra,
Is it not dreadful? pity me, Ægisthus,
I am a mother still.

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou art my wife;
Thou art my queen; reſume thy wonted courage,
And be thyſelf again; indulge no more
This fooliſh fondneſs for ungrateful children,
Who merit not thy love; conſult alone
Ægiſthus' ſafety, and thy own repoſe.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Repoſe! the guilty mind can ne'er enjoy it.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

WHITHER, my Pylades, hath cruel fate
Conducted us? alas! Oreſtes lives
But to increaſe the ſorrows of his friend:
Our arms, our treaſures, and our ſoldiers loſt
In the rude ſtorm; here on this deſert coaſt,
No ſuccour near, deſerted and forlorn
We wander on, and nought but hope remains.
Where are we?

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

That I know not; but ſince fate
Hath led us hither, let us not deſpair;
It is enough for me, Oreſtes lives:
Be confident; the barbarous Ægiſthus
In vain purſued thy life, which heav'n preſerv'd
In Epidaurus, when thy arm ſubdued
The gallant Pliſthenes: let nought alarm
Or terrify thy ſoul, but boldly urge
Thy way, protected by that guardian God
Who watches o'er the juſt, the great avenger,
Who hath already to thy valour giv'n
The ſon, and promis'd that e'er long the father
Shall follow him.

ORESTES.

Alas, my friend, that God
In anger now withdraws his pow'rful aid,
And frowns upon us, as thy cruel fate
Too plainly ſhews; a terrible example!
But ſay, within the rock didſt thou conceal
The urn, which to Mycenæ, horrid ſeat
Of murther, by the gods command, we bear;
That urn which holds the aſhes of my foe,
Of Pliſthenes; with that we muſt deceive
The tyrant.

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

I have done it.

ORESTES.

Gracious heav'n!
When ſhall we reap the fruits of our obedience?
When will the wiſh'd-for day of vengeance come?
Shall I again behold my native ſoil,
The dear, the dreadful place where firſt I ſaw
The light of day? Where ſhall I find my ſiſter,
The pride, the glory, of admiring Greece;
That gen'rous maid, whom all unite to praiſe,
But none will dare to ſuccour? She preſerv'd
My life; and, worthy of her noble father,
Hath never bent beneath th'oppreſſive hand
Of pow'r, but brav'd the fury of the ſtorm.
How many kings, how many heroes, fought
For Menelaus! Agamemnon dies,
And Greece forgets him, whilſt his hapleſs ſon,
Deſerted, wanders o'er a faithleſs world,
To ſeek ſome bleſt azylum for repoſe.
Alas, without thy friendſhip I had been
The moſt diſtreſs'd, moſt abject of mankind:
But heav'n, in pity to my woes, hath ſent
My Pylades; it wou'd not let me periſh,
But gave me to ſubdue my hated foe,

And

id half revenge my father: ſay, my friend,
'hat path will leads us the tyrant's court?

PYLADES.

:hold that palace, and the tow'ring height
f yon proud temple, the dark grove o'ergrown
'ith Cypreſs, and the tomb, rich images
f mournful ſplendor all: and ſee! this way
dvancing, comes a venerable ſage,
f mildeſt aſpect, and whoſe years, no doubt,
ave long experience of calamity;
is ſoul will melt at thy diſaſtrous fate.

ORESTES.

ev'ry mortal born to ſuffer? hark!
e groans, my Pylades.

SCENE II.

ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

PYLADES.

Whoe'er thou art,
:op, and inform us: we are ſtrangers here.
'wo poor unhappy friends, long time the ſport
)f winds and waves, now on this unknown ſhore
'aſt helpleſs, can'ſt thou tell us if this place
Will be or fatal to us, or propitious?

PAMMENES.

PAMMENES.

I am a ſimple, plain old man, and here
Worſhip the gods, adore their juſtice, live
In humble fear of them, and exerciſe
The ſacred rights of hoſpitality;
Ye both are welcome to my little cottage,
There to deſpiſe with me the pride of kings,
Their pomp and riches: come, my friends, for ſuch
I ever hold the wretched.

ORESTES.

Gen'rous ſtranger,
May gracious heav'n inſpire us with the means
To recompence thy goodneſs! but inform us
What place is this; who is your king?

PAMMENES.

Ægiſthus:
I am his ſubject.

ORESTES.

Terrors, crimes, and vengeance!
O Heav'n, Ægiſthus!

PYLADES.

Soft: do not betray us;
Be careful.

ORESTES.

Gods, Ægiſthus! he who murther'd ——

PAMMENES

PAMMENES.

The ſame.

ORESTES.

And Clytemnæſtra, lives ſhe ſtill
After that fatal blow?

PAMMENES.

She reigns with him;
The reſt is known too well.

ORESTES.

That tomb before us,
And yonder palace ——

PAMMENES.

Is inhabited
Now by Ægiſthus; built, I well remember,
By worthier hands, and for a better uſe.
The tomb thou ſee'ſt, forgive me if I weep
At the remembrance, is the tomb of him
I lov'd, my lord, my king — of Agamemnon.

ORESTES.

O 'tis too much! I ſink beneath it.

PYLADES.

Hide
Thy tears, my friend.

[To Oreſtes, who turns away from him.

PAMMENES.

You ſeem much mov'd, and fain
Wou'd ſtop the tide of grief: O give it way,
Indulge thy ſorrows, and lament the ſon
Of gods, the noble conqueror of Troy;
Whilſt they inſult his ſacred mem'ry here,
Strangers ſhall weep the fate of Agamemnon.

ORESTES.

A ſtranger as I am, I cannot look
With cold indiff'rence on the noble race
Of Atreus, 'tis a Grecians duty ever
To weep the fate of heroes, and I ought ——
But doth Electra live in Argos ſtill?

PAMMENES.

She doth, ſhe's here.

ORESTES.

I run, I fly to meet her.

PYLADES.

Ha! whether woud'ſt thou go! what, brave the gods!
Hazard thy precious life! forbear, my lord.

[To Pammenes.

O, ſir, conduct us to the neigh'ring temple,

Ther

Here will we lay our gifts before the altar
In humble duty, and adore that God
Who rul'd the waves, and ſav'd us from deſtruction.

ORESTES.

Wilt thou conduct us to the ſacred tomb
Where lie the aſhes of a murther'd hero?
There muſt I offer to his honour'd ſhade
A ſecret ſacrifice.

PAMMENES.

O Heav'nly juſtice,
Thou ſacrifice to him! amidſt his foes!
O noble youth! my maſter had a ſon,
Who, in Electra's arms—but I forbear,
Egiſthus comes: away; I'll follow you.

ORESTES.

Egiſthus! ha!

PYLADES.

We muſt avoid his preſence.

SCENE. III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, PAMMENES.

ÆGISTHUS. [To Pammenes.

Who are thoſe ſtrangers? one of them methought
Seem'd, by his ſtately port and fair demeanor,

Of

Of noble birth, a gloom of melancholy
Hangs on his brow: he ſtruck me as he paſt:
Is he our ſubject? know you whence he came?

PAMMENES.

I only know they are unfortunate;
Driv'n by the tempeſt on thoſe rocks, they came
For ſhelter here; as ſtrangers I reliev'd them;
It was my duty: if they tell me truth,
Greece is their country.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou ſhalt anſwer for them
On peril of thy life.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas! my lord,
Can theſe poor objects raiſe ſuſpicion?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes:
The people murmur; ev'ry thing alarms me.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Such for theſe fifteen years hath been our fate,
To fear, and to be fear'd; the bitter poiſon
To all my happineſs.

ÆGISTHUS.

Away, Pammenes;
Let me know who and whence they are; why thus

They

They come ſo near the palace; from what port
Their veſſel ſail'd, and wherefore on the ſeas
Where I command: away, and bring me word.

SCENE IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Well, madam, to remove your idle fears,
Th' interpreters of heav'n it ſeems at length
Have been conſulted; but in vain: their ſilence
Doubles your grief, and heighthens your deſpair;
For to thyſelf, thy reſtleſs ſpirit ne'er
Will know repoſe; thou trembleſt at the thought
Of thy ſon's death, yet fear'ſt his dang'rous life:
Conſult no more your doubtful oracles,
And heſitating prieſts, that brood in ſecret
O'er the dark boſom of futurity;
But hear Ægiſthus, he ſhall give thee peace,
And ſatisfy thy ſoul: this hand determines,
This tongue pronounces Clytemnæſtra's fate:
If thou woud'ſt live and reign, confide in me,
And me alone, and let me hear no more
Of your unworthy ſon; but for Electra,
She's to be fear'd, and we muſt think of her:
Perhaps her marriage with my Pliſthenes
Might ſtop the mouth of faction, and appeaſe

The diſcontented people: thou woud'ſt wiſh
To ſee the deadly hatred, that ſo long
Hath raged between us, ſoften'd into peace;
To ſee our int'reſts and our hearts united:
Let it be ſo. Go thou, and talk with her;
But take good heed her pride refuſes not
The proffer'd boon, that were an inſult ſoon
She might repent of; but I hope with you,
That ſlav'ry hath bow'd down her haughty ſpirit,
That this unhop'd for unexpected change
From poverty and chains to rank and ſplendor,
Join'd to a mother's kind authority,
And above all, Ambition, will perſuade her
To ſeize the golden minute, and be wiſe:
But if ſhe ſpurns the happineſs that courts her,
Her inſolence ſhall meet its due reward.
Your fooliſh fondneſs, and her father's name,
Have fed her pride too long; but let her dread,
If ſhe ſubmits not, a ſeverer fate,
Chains heavier far, and endleſs baniſhment.

SCENE. V.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Come near, my daughter, and with milder looks
Behold thy mother: I have mourn'd in ſecret,

And wept with thee thy hard and cruel bondage,
Though not unmerited; for ſure thy hatred
Was moſt unjuſt, Electra: as a Queen,
I was offended; as a mother, griev'd;
But I have gain'd your pardon, and your rights
Are all reſtor'd.

ELECTRA.

O madam, at your feet ——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But I wou'd ſtill do more.

ELECTRA.

What more?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Support
Your race, reſtore the honour'd name of Pelops,
And re-unite his long-divided children.

ELECTRA.

Ha! talk'ſt thou of Oreſtes? ſpeak, go on.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I ſpeak of thee, and hope at laſt Electra
Will be Electra's friend: I know thy ſoul
Aſpires to empire, be thyſelf again,
And let thy hopes tranſport thee to the throne
Of Argos and Mycenæ; riſe from chains

And ignominious ſlav'ry to the throne
Of thy great anceſtors: Ægiſthus yields
To my intreaties, as a daughter yet
He wou'd embrace thee, to his Pliſthenes
Wou'd join Electra; ev'ry hour the youth
From Epidaurus is expected here;
When he returns he weds you: look, my daughter,
Tow'rds the bright proſpect of thy future glory,
And bury all the paſt in deep oblivion.

ELECTRA,

Can I forget the paſt, or look with joy
On that which is to come? O cruel fate,
This is the worſt indignity that e'er
Electra bore: remember whence I ſprang,
Remember, I am Agamemnon's daughter,
And woud'ſt thou bind me to his murth'rer's ſon?
Give me my chains again, oppreſs my ſoul
With all the horrors of baſe ſervitude;
All that the tyrant e'er inflicted on me,
Shame and reproach ſuit with my ſad condition;
I have ſupported them, and look'd on death
Without a fear: a thouſand times Ægiſthus
Hath threaten'd me with death, but this is worſe;
Thou art more cruel far to aſk my vows,

My

My love, my honour; but I ſee your aim,
I know your purpoſe; poor Oreſtes ſlain,
His murth'rer trembles at a ſiſter's claim,
And dreads my title to a father's throne:
The tyrant wants my hand to ſecond him,
To ſeal his poor precarious rights with mine,
And make me an accomplice in his guilt:
O if I have a right Ægiſthus fears,
Let him eraſe my title in my blood,
And tear it from me: if another arm
Be needful to his purpoſe, lend him thine;
Strike here, and join Electra to her brother;
Strike here, and I ſhall know 'tis Clytemnæſtra.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

It is too much: ungrateful as thou art,
I pity'd thee; but all my hopes are paſt:
What have I done, what wou'd I do, to bend
Thy ſtubborn heart? tears, menaces, reproaches,
And love and tenderneſs, the throne itſelf,
Which but for me thou never coud'ſt have hop'd,
Pray'rs, puniſhment, and pardon, nought avail'd,
And now I yield thee to thy fate: farewell!
Thou ſay'ſt that thou ſhalt know me for thy mother,
For Clytemnæſtra, by my cruelty:

I am thy mother, and I am thy Queen,
Remember that; to Agamemnon's race
Nought do I owe but hatred and revenge;
I will not warm a ſerpent in my breaſt
To ſting me: henceforth ſtorm, complain, and weep,
I ſhall not heed the clamours of a ſlave:
I lov'd thee once, with grief I own I lov'd thee;
But from this hour remember Clytemnæſtra
Is not thy mother, but Ægiſthus' wife;
The bonds are broken that united us,
Electra broke them; nature hath diſclaim'd,
And I abjure them.

SCENE VI.

ELECTRA. alone

Gracious heavn! is this
A mother's voice? O day the bitt'reſt ſure
That ever roſe ſince my dear father's death!
I fear I ſaid too much, but my full heart,
Spite of myſelf, wou'd pour its venom forth:
She told me my Oreſtes was no more;
Cou'd I bear that? O if a cruel mother
Has robb'd me of my beſt, my deareſt treaſure,
Why ſhou'd I court my worſt of foes, why fawn
And cringe to her, to live a vile dependant

On

On her precarious bounties; to lift up
Theſe wither'd hands to unrelenting heav'n,
To ſee my father's bed and throne uſurp'd
By this baſe ſpoiler, this inhuman tyrant,
Who robb'd me of a mother's heart, and now
Hath ta'en Oreſtes from me?

SCENE. VII.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

O Electra,
Complain no more.

ELECTRA.

Why not?

IPHISA.

Partake my joy.

ELECTRA.

Joy is a ſtranger to this heart, Iphiſa,
And ever ſhall be.

IPHISA.

Still there's hope.

ELECTRA.

O no,
Still muſt we weep: for if I may believe

A mother, our dear brother, our Oreſtes,
Is dead.

IPHISA.

And if I may believe theſe eyes,
He lives, he's here, Electra.

ELECTRA.

Can it be?
Good heav'n! O do not trifle with a heart
Like mine: Iphiſa, did'ſt thou ſay Oreſtes?

IPHISA.

I did.

ELECTRA.

Thou woud'ſt not with a flatt'ring dream
Deceive me, my Iphiſa — but, go on,
For hope and fear diſtract me.

IPHISA.

O my ſiſter,
Two ſtrangers, caſt by ſome benignant God
On theſe unhappy coaſts, are juſt arriv'd,
And hither, by the care of good Pammenes,
Conducted; one of them ——

ELECTRA.

I faint: I die —
Well, one of them ——

IPHISA

IPHISA.

I ſaw the noble youth:
O what a luſtre ſparkled in his eye!
His air, his mein, his ev'ry geſture bore
The perfect ſemblage of a demi-god;
Ev'n as they paint th' illuſtrious Grecian chief,
The conqueror of Troy; ſuch majeſty
And ſweet deportment ne'er did I behold;
But with Pammenes he retir'd, and hid
His beauteous form from my deſiring eyes:
Struck with the charming image, and amaz'd,
I ran to ſeek thee here, beneath the ſhade
Of this dark grove, to tell the pleaſing tale:
But mark what follow'd — on the ſacred tomb,
Where we ſo oft have mingled our ſad tears,
I ſaw freſh garlands, ſaw the votive wreath,
The water ſprinkled o'er it, and the hair
Doubtleſs of thoſe whom I ſo late had ſeen,
Th' illuſtrious ſtrangers: near to theſe was laid,
What moſt confirm'd my hopes, a glitt'ring ſword,
That ſpoke methought the day of vengeance near:
Who but a ſon, a brother, and a hero,
Rais'd by the gods to ſave his falling country,
Wou'd dare to brave the tyrant thus? 'Tis he,
Electra, heav'n hath ſent him to our aid,

The light'ning glares upon us, and the thunder
Will ſoon be heard.

ELECTRA.

I muſt believe Iphiſa,
And hope the beſt; but is it not a ſnare
Laid by the tyrant? Come: we'll know the truth,
Let us away — I muſt be ſatisfy'd.

IPHISA.

We muſt not ſearch him in the dark retreat
Where he is hid, Pammenes ſays, his life
Wou'd anſwer for it.

ELECTRA.

Ha! what doſt thou ſay?
Alas! we are deceiv'd, betray'd, Iphiſa,
By cruel heav'n: thus, after fifteen years,
Reſtor'd, Oreſtes wou'd have ran with joy
To the dear arms that ſav'd him, wou'd have chear'd
Electra's mournful heart, he ne'er had fled
From thee, Iphiſa: O that ſword thou ſaw'ſt,
Which rais'd thy ſanguine hope, alarms my fears;
A cruel mother wou'd be well inform'd,
And in her eyes I read the barb'rous joy
She felt within: O dart one ray of hope,
Ye vengeful gods, on my deſpairing ſoul!

Will

Will not Pammenes yield to my intreaties?
He will; he muſt: away, I'll ſpeak to him.

IPHISA.

Do not, Electra; think what cruel eyes
Watch o'er our ſteps, and mark our ev'ry action.
If he is come, we ſhall diſcover him
By our fond zeal, and hazard his ſweet life:
If we're deceiv'd, our ſearch but irritates
The tyrant, and endangers good Pammenes:
But let us pay our duty at the tomb,
There we at leaſt may weep without offence.
Who knows, Electra, but the noble ſtranger
May meet us in that bleſt aſylum; there
That heav'n, whoſe goodneſs thy impatient rage
Hath call'd in queſtion, may yet hear my vows,
And give him to our wiſhes and our tears:
Let us be gone.

ELECTRA.

Thou haſt reviv'd my hopes:
But O! I die with grief, if thou deceiv'ſt me.

END of the SECOND ACT.

SCENE

ACT III. SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

[A Slave at the further end of the ſtage carrying an urn, and a ſword.]

PAMMENES.

BLEST be the day that to our wiſhes thus
Reſtores the long-expected hope of Greece,
My royal maſter's ſon, the miniſter
Of heav'ns high will, to execute ſwift vengeance
On Agamemnon's foes! The tyrant long
Hath dreaded, long foreſeen th' impending blow;
Conſcious of guilt, in ev'ry face unknown
Still he beholds his maſter and his judge,
And ſtill Oreſtes haunts his troubled ſoul:
Much he enquires concerning you, and longs
To ſee you both. I have a thouſand fears,
A thouſand hopes; heav'n grant we may ſucceed!
Mean time I have obey'd your orders, ſounded
The people's hearts, and ſtrove to animate
Their zeal; inſpir'd them with the diſtant hope
Of an avenger; ſoon or late the race
Of rightful kings muſt proſper: ev'ry heart
Glow'd with warm tranſport at Oreſtes' name;
Awaken'd from her ſlumber, vengeance riſes

With

With double vigour; my few faithful friends,
Who dwell in this lone defert with Pammenes,
Lift up their hands to heav'n, and call on thee;
And yet I tremble to behold thee here
Unarm'd and unaffifted, leaft fome chance
Difcover thee, and blaft our hopes: the foe
Is barb'rous, active, vigilant, and bold;
One fatal ftroke may ruin all; whilft thou,
Againft a tyrant feated on his throne,
Bring'ft nothing but Oreftes, and his friend.

PYLADES.

And are not they fufficient? 'Tis the work
Of heav'n that oft fulfills its own defigns
By means moft wonderful, that in the deep
O'erwhelm'd our little all, and here alone
Hath left us to perform the facrifice.
Sometimes it arms the fov'reigns of the earth
With tenfold vengeance; fometimes, in contempt
Of human valour, ftrikes in awful filence;
Nature and friendfhip then affert the rights
Of heav'n, and vindicate its pow'r divine.

ORESTES.

Oreftes afks no other aid, no arm
But thine, my Pylades.

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

Take heed, my friend,
Quit not the paths of ſafety pointed out
By the juſt gods; remember thou art bound
By ſolemn oath to hide thee from Electra;
Your peace, your happineſs, your kingdom, all
Depend upon it: O refrain your tranſports,
Diſſemble, and obey; 'tis fit Electra
Shou'd be deceiv'd, ev'n more than Clytemnæſtra.

PAMMENES.

Thank heav'n, that thus ordain'd it for thy ſafety.
Already hath Electra, bath'd in tears,
And calling for her great avenger, fill'd
Theſe ſolitary manſions with her cries;
Importunate and bold, ſhe ſought me out,
And with imprudent warmth, demanded loud,
Where was her brother, where her dear Oreſtes:
Nature had whiſper'd to her anxious heart
He was not far from his Electra: ſcarce
Cou'd I withold her eager ſteps.

ORESTES.

Ye gods!
Muſt I refrain? O inſupportable!

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

You heſitate; O think, my dear Oreſtes,
Think on the menaces of angry heav'n,
Think on its goodneſs that preſerv'd thy life
From ev'ry danger; if thou ſhould'ſt oppoſe
Its ſacred will, eternal wrath awaits
To blaſt thy purpoſe; tremble, ſon of Atreus
And Tantalus, remember what thy hapleſs race
Hath ſuffer'd, nor expect a milder doom.

ORESTES.

What pow'r invincible preſides unſeen
O'er human actions, and directs our fate?
Is it a crime to liſten to the voice
Of fond affection? O eternal juſtice,
Thou deep abyſs, unſearchable to man!
Shall not our weakneſs and our guilt by thee
Be ſtill diſtinguiſh'd? ſhall the man who wanders
From virtue's paths unknowing, and who braves
Thy pow'r, ſhall he who yields to nature's laws,
And he who breaks them, ſhare an equal fate?
But ſhall the ſlave condemn his maſter? heav'n
Gave us our being, and can owe us nothing:
Therefore no more: in ſilence I obey.
Give me the urn, the ring, and bloody ſword,
Which thou haſt hither brought, they ſhall be offer'd

Far

Far from Electra's ſight: let us be gone;
I'll ſee my ſiſter when I have reveng'd her.

[Turning to Pammenes.

Go thou, Pammenes, and prepare the hearts
Of thy brave followers for the great event
Which Greece awaits, and I muſt execute:
Deceive Ægiſthus, and my guilty mother;
Let them enjoy the tranſitory bliſs,
The ſhort-liv'd pleaſure of Oreſtes' death,
If an unnat'ral mother can behold
With joy the aſhes of a murther'd ſon:
Here will I wait, and ſtop them as they paſs.

SCENE II.

ELECTRA and IPHISIA on one ſide of the ſtage, ORESTES and PYLADES on the other, with a ſlave carrying an urn and a ſword.

ELECTRA. [To Iphiſa.

Hope diſappointed is the worſt of ſorrows.
O my Iphiſa, all thy flatt'ring dreams
Are vaniſh'd, and Pammenes, with a word,
Hath undeceiv'd us; the fair day that ſhone
So bright is clouded o'er, and darkneſs ſpreads
On ev'ry ſide: alas! our wretched life
Is but a round of never-ending woes.

ORESTES.

ORESTES. [To Pylades.

Two women, and in tears!

PYLADES.

Alas, my lord,

Beneath a tyrant all things wear the face
Of grief and mis'ry.

ORESTES.

In Ægisthus' court
Nothing shou'd reign but sorrow.

IPHISA.

[To Electra.

Look, Electra,

The strangers come this way.

ELECTRA.

Unhappy omen!

They did pronounce Ægisthus' hated name.

IPHISA.

One is that hero whom I told thee of;
The noble youth ——

ELECTRA.

[Looking at Orestes.

Alas! I too, like thee,

Had been deceiv'd.

[Turning

[Turning to Oreſtes.

Who are ye, wretched ſtrangers;
And what hath led you to this fatal ſhore?

ORESTES.

We come to ſee the king who reigns in Argos,
And take our orders from him.

ELECTRA.

Are ye Grecians,
And call ye him a king, the murtherer
Of Agamemnon?

ORESTES.

He is ſov'reign here,
And heav'n commands us to reſpect his throne,
Not to diſpute his title.

ELECTRA.

Horrid maxim!
And what have you to aſk of this proud king,
This bloody monſter here?

ORESTES.

We come to bring him
Some happy tidings.

ELECTRA.

Dreadful then to us
They muſt be.

IPHISA. [Seeing the Urn.

Ha! an urn! O grief, O horror!

PYLADES.

Oreſtes ——

ELECTRA.

O ye gods! Oreſtes dead!

I faint, I die.

ORESTES.

What have we done, my friend!

They cou'd not be miſtaken, for their grief

Betrays them: O! my blood runs cold.—Fair princeſs,

Be comforted, and live.

ELECTRA.

Oreſtes dead?

And can I live? O no, barbarians, here

Complete your cruelty.

IPHISA.

Alas! you ſee

The poor remains of Agamemnon; we

Are his unhappy daughters, the ſad ſiſters

Of loſt Oreſtes.

ORESTES.

O Electra! O

Iphiſa! O where am I? cruel gods!

[To the ſlave carrying the urn.

Take from their ſight thoſe monuments of woe,

That

That fatal urn, which ——

ELECTRA.

[Running towards the urn.

Woud'ſt thou take it from me?

Woud'ſt thou deprive me of the little all
That's left Electra by offended heav'n?
O give it me.

[She takes the urn, and embraces it.

ORESTES.

Forbear; what woud'ſt thou do?

PYLADES.

Away: Ægiſthus only muſt receive
Theſe precious reliques.

ELECTRA.

Muſt I then behold
My brother's aſhes in a tyrant's hand,
And are Oreſtes' murtherers before me?

ORESTES.

Horrid reproach! it ſhocks my very ſoul:
I can no longer ——

ELECTRA.

Yet you weep with me:
O, in the name of the avenging gods,

If ye are guiltleſs, if your gen'rous hands
Collected his dear aſhes ——

ORESTES.

Gracious heav'n!

ELECTRA.

If ye lament his death, O anſwer me:
Who told you of his fate: art thou his friend?
Speak, noble youth: both dumb! yet both afflicted:
Ev'n whilſt your words plant daggers in my heart,
Ye ſeem to pity me.

ORESTES.

It is too much;
The gods have been obey'd enough already.

ELECTRA.

What ſay'ſt thou?

ORESTES.

Leave thoſe poor remains.

ELECTRA.

O no:
I never will: alas! is ev'ry heart
Inflexible? I tell thee, cruel ſtranger,
I muſt not, cannot give thee back again
The fatal gift thy pity hath beſtow'd:
'Tis my Oreſtes; and I will embrace him:
Behold his dying ſiſter.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Cruel gods!
Where are your thunders now? O ſtrike: Electra,
I can no longer ——

ELECTRA.

Ha!

ORESTES.

I ought ——

PYLADES.

O heav'n!

ELECTRA.

Go on ——

ORESTES.

Know then ——

SCENE III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, IPHISA, PAMMENES, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

O glorious ſpectacle!
Fortune, I thank thee: Can it be, Pammenes?
My rival dead! it is, it muſt be true,
Electra's grief confirms it.

ELECTRA.

Dreadful hour?

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

To what am I reſerv'd?

ÆGISTHUS.

Seize on the urn,

And wreſt it from her.

[They take the urn from her.

ELECTRA.

O thou haſt robb'd me of the only good
This life cou'd e'er afford me, barb'rous monſter!
O take Electra too, tear forth this heart
And join me to Oreſtes; father, ſon,
Siſter, and brother, all thy wretched victims
Unite to ſatiate thy revenge: now, tyrant,
Enjoy thy happineſs, enjoy thy crimes:
And thou, inhuman mother, look with him
On the delightful ſpectacle, it ſuits
Thy nature, and is worthy of you both

[Iphiſa leads her off.

SCENE IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ORESTES' PYLADES, Guards.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Muſt I bear this?

ÆGISTHUS.

She ſhall be puniſh'd for it:

Let

Let her complain to heav'n, for heav'n itſelf
Will juſtify Ægiſthus; it approves
Where it forbids not; therefore I am guiltleſs,
And happy too: my throne ſtands firmely now,
My life's in ſafety; but I muſt reward
The zeal and valour of theſe noble Grecians.

ORESTES.

It was our duty, royal ſir, to lay
Theſe proofs before you: take this ſword, this ring,
You muſt remember it: 'twas Agamemnon's.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

And was it then by thee Oreſtes fell?

ÆGISTHUS.

If thou haſt ſerv'd me, thine be the reward:
But, ſay, who art thou, of what race?

ORESTES.

My name
Muſt not as yet be known; perhaps hereafter
It may be: in the fields of Troy my father
Diſtinguiſh'd ſhone amongſt the great avengers
Of Menelaus; in thoſe days of glory
He fought, and fell: deſerted and forlorn,
Left by a cruel mother, and purſued
By moſt inhuman foes, this friend alone

Supported

Supported me; was fortune, father, all:
With him I ſtill have trod the paths of honour,
With him defy'd the malice of my fate:
Such is my ſtory.

ÆGISTHUS.

But ſay where thy arm
Reveng'd me of this hated prince: inform me.

ORESTES.

'Twas in a wood that to the temple leads
Of Epidaurus, near Achemor's tomb.

ÆGISTHUS.

The king had ſet a price upon his head:
How came you not to aſk for your reward?

ORESTES.

Becauſe I hated infamy, and fought
For vengeance, not for hire; I did not mean
To ſell his blood; a private motive rais'd
This arm againſt him, as my friend well knows,
And I reveng'd myſelf without the aid
Of kings, nor ſhall I boaſt the victory:
Forgive me, ſir: I tremble; for the widow
Of Agamemnon's here; perhaps I've ſerv'd,
Perhaps offended her; I'll take my leave.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou ſhalt not; ſtay, I charge thee.

CLYTEMNÆSTA.

Let him go:
That urn, and the ſad ſtory he has told,
Have fill'd my ſoul with horror: heav'n, my lord,
Protects your throne and life, be thankful for it,
And leave a mother to indulge her ſorrows.

ORESTES.

Madam, I thought that Agamemnon's ſon
Was hateful to you.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I muſt own I fear'd him.

ORESTES.

Fear'd him?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I did indeed; for he was born
To be moſt guilty.

ORESTES.

Guilty? and to whom?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

The wretched wanderer, thou know'ſt, was doom'd
To hate a mother, doom'd to ſhed the blood
From whence he ſprang; ſuch was his horrid fate:
Perhaps he had fulfill'd — and yet his death,

I know not why, affrights me, and I tremble
To look on you who ſav'd me from his vengeance.

ORESTES.

Alas! a ſon againſt a mother arm'd!
O who cou'd looſe that ſacred tye? perhaps
He wiſh'd ——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O heav'n!

ÆGISTHUS.

What ſay'ſt thou? didſt thou know him?

PYLADES. [Aſide.

He will diſcover all.

[To Ægiſthus.

He did, my lord,
The wretched ſoon unite, and ſoon divide:
At Delphi firſt we ſaw him.

ORESTES.

Yes: I knew
His purpoſe well.

ÆGISTHUS.

What wa'ſt?

ORESTES.

To murther thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

I've ſeen his malice long, but I deſpis'd it.

Mean time Electra us'd Oreſtes' name
To ſpread diviſion o'er my kingdom; ſhe
Was my worſt foe: thou haſt reveng'd me of her,
Take thy reward, I yield her to thy pow'r;
She ſhall be thine: the haughty maid, who ſpurn'd
The great alliance with Ægiſthus' ſon;
Henceforth ſhe is thy ſlave: the wretched race
Of Priam long beneath the conqu'rors yoke
Submiſſive bow'd, and dragg'd the ſervile chain;
And wherefore ſhou'd not Agamemnon's blood
Bend in its turn, and ſhare an equal fate?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Wou'd Clytemnæſtra ſuffer that!

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou woud'ſt not
Defend thy worſt of foes; proſcribe Oreſtes,
Yet ſpare Electra.

[To Oreſtes.

Leave the urn with me.

ORESTES.

We will, my lord, and ſhall accept your offer.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

That were to carry our reſentment further

That

Than juſtice warrants: let him hence, and bear
Some other recompenſe: we too muſt go:
Let us, my lord, I beg thee, let us quit
Theſe horrid manſions of the dead, where nought
But dreadful images on ev'ry ſide
Surround me: O! we never can prepare
The bloody feaſt between the father's tomb
And the ſon's aſhes: how ſhall we invoke
The houſhold gods, whom we have injur'd; how,
Amid'ſt our cruel ſports, give up the blood
Of Clytemnæſtra to the murtherer
Of her Oreſtes? O it muſt not be;
I tremble at the thought: my fears, Ægiſthus,
Shou'd waken thine: this ſtranger rives my heart;
His very ſight is deadlieſt poiſon to me.
Away, my lord, and let me be conceal'd
From ev'ry eye; wou'd it were poſſible
To hide me from myſelf!

[Exit Clytemnæſtra.

ÆGISTHUS.

[To Oreſtes.

Stay thou, and wait
Till time befriend thee; nature for a moment
Is clamorous and loud, but ſoon as reaſon
Shall re-aſſume its empire, int'reſt then
Muſt plead thy cauſe, and ſhe alone be heard.

Mean time remain with us, and celebrate
Our nuptial day:

[To one of his Attendants.

Haſte you to Epidaurus,
And hither bring my ſon; let him confirm
The welcome tidings.

SCENE V.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

Yes, Oreſtes comes
To join the cruel pomp, and make thy feaſt
A feaſt of blood.

PYLADES.

O how I trembled for thee!
I fear'd thy love; I fear'd thy tenderneſs;
And, more than all, thy honeſt rage, that burſt
In tranſports forth when thou beheld'ſt the tyrant:
I ſaw thee ready to inſult him; ſaw
Thy ſoul take fire at Agamemnon's name,
And dreaded the ſad conſequence.

ORESTES.

My mother,
O Pylades, my mother pierc'd my heart.
Did'ſt thou not mark the workings of her ſoul
Whilſt I was ſpeaking? O I felt them all.

Scarce

Scarce cou'd my voice in fault'ring accents tell
The melancholy tale, whilſt Clytemnæſtra
Still gaz'd, and trembled ſtill : a father's murther ;
A ſiſter unreveng'd ; a tyrant yet
Unpuniſh'd ; and a mother to be taught
Her int'reſt and her duty ; what a weight
Of ſecret cares ! great heav'n complete thy work !
Urge on the ling'ring moments that retard
My vengeance ; O let me perform the taſk
Of love, and hatred ; let me mix the blood
Of baſe Ægiſthus with the vile remains
Of Pliſthenes ; let ſweet Electra ſee
The cruel tyrant gaſping at my feet,
And know her dear deliv'rer in Oreſtes !

SCENE VI.

ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

ORESTES.

What haſt thou done, Pammenes, may we hope —

PAMMENES.

O my dear lord, ne'er, ſince the fatal day
When Agamemnon fell, did greater perils
Threaten thy precious life.

ORESTES.

Ha ! what hath happend ?

PYLADES.

Still
Muſt I have cauſe to tremble for Oreſtes?

PAMMENES.

This inſtant is arriv'd a meſſenger
From Epidaurus, and e'er this related
The death of Pliſthenes.

PYLADES.

Immortal gods!

ORESTES.

And knows he that Oreſtes ſlew his ſon?

PAMMENES.

They ſpeak of nothing but his death; e'er long
Freſh tidings are expected; and the news
Mean time conceal'd from Greece that ſhe has loſt
One of her tyrants; the king, ſtill in doubt,
Shuts himſelf up with Clytemnæſtra: this
I learn'd from one, who, to the royal blood
Still faithful, pines in loathſome ſervitude
Beneath the proud uſurper.

ORESTES.

I have gather'd
At leaſt the firſt fair fruits of promis'd vengeance;
Grant me, ye gods, to reap a plenteous harveſt!
Think'ſt thou, my friend, they wou'd uplift this arm
In vain, and only proſper to deceive me;

To

To my ſucceſsful valour give the ſon,
And after yield me to the father's pow'r?
Let us away: danger ſhou'd make us bold;
Who fears not death is maſter of his foe;
I'll ſeize the moment of uncertainty,
E'er the full day of truth glares in upon him,
And points his rage.

PAMMENES

Away: you muſt be known
To thoſe few noble ſpirits who will die
To ſerve their prince; this ſecret place conceals
Some faithful friends, who may be ſtill more uſeful,
Becauſe unknown.

PYLADES.

Haſte then; and if the tomb
Of thy dear father, if thy honour'd name
Join'd to Electra's, if the wrath of heav'n
Againſt uſurpers, if the gracious gods
Who hither led thee, if they all ſhou'd fail,
If this deteſted ſpot is doom'd by fate
To be thy grave, O take a wretched life
To thee devoted, we will die together,
That comfort's left; for Pylades ſhall fall
Cloſe by thy ſide, and worthy of Oreſtes.

ORESTES.

trike me, kind heav'n! but O for pity ſave
His matchleſs valour, and protect my friend!

END of the THIRD ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

PErhaps the vigilance of good Pammenes
May for a while remove the king's ſuſpicions;
And gracious heav'n, in pity to our woes,
Deceive Ægiſthus to a fond belief,
That the devoted race of Tantalus
Is now no more; but, O my Pylades,
The ſword I offer'd at my father's tomb
Is ſtol'n by ſacrilegious hands, that reach
Ev'n to the ſacred manſions of the dead:
If it be carry'd to the tyrant, all
Will be diſcover'd; let us haſte, my friend,
And ſeize him, e'er it be too late.

PYLADES.

Pammenes
Is watchful o'er our int'reſt; we muſt wait
For him: when we have gather'd the few friends

That

That mean to ſerve us, be this tomb the place
Of meeting for us all, Pammenes then
Will join us here.

ORESTES.

O Pylades, O heav'n!
This barb'rous law that forces me to wound
A tender heart that lives but for Oreſtes!
And muſt I leave Electra to her ſorrows?

PYLADES.

Yes: thou haſt ſworn it, therefore perſevere;
Thou haſt more cauſe to dread Electra now
Than all thy foes; ſhe may deſtroy, but ne'er
Can ſerve us, and the tyrant's eyes may ſoon
Be open'd: O ſubdue, if poſſible,
The pangs of nature, and conceal thy love:
We came not here to comfort thy Electra,
But to revenge her.

ORESTES

See, my Pylades,
She comes this way, perhaps in ſearch of me.

PYLADES.

Her ev'ry ſtep is watch'd: you muſt not ſee her:
Begone; and doubt not, I'll obſerve her well;
The eyes of friendſhip ſeldom are deceiv'd.

SCENE

SCENE II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PYLADES.

ELECTRA.

The villain hath eſcap'd me; he avoids
My fiated ſight, and leaves me to my fate,
To fruitleſs rage, and unavailing tears,
Without the hope of vengeance: ſay, barbarian,
Thou vile accomplice in his crimes, where went
The murtherer, my tyrant, my new lord,
(For ſo it ſeems Ægiſthus has decreed)
Where is he gone?

PYLADES.

To do the will of heav'n,
In dutiful obedience to the gods;
And well wou'd it become the royal maid
To follow his example: fate oftimes
Deceives the hearts of men, directs in ſecret,
And guides their wand'ring ſteps through paths unknown:
Oftimes it ſinks us in the deep abyſs
Of mis'ry, and then raiſes us to joy;
Binds us in chains, or lifts us to a throne,
And gives us life midſt horrors, tombs, and death.
Complain no more, but yield to thy new ſorrows;
Be patient, and be happy: fare thee well.

SCENE

SCENE III.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

He ſwells my rage to fury and deſpair:
Thinks he I'll tamely bear theſe cruel inſults?
Cou'd not a father's and a brother's death
Fill up the meaſure of Electra's woes;
But ſhe muſt bend beneath the vile aſſaſſin
Of her Oreſtes; be a common ſlave
To all the murth'rers of her hapleſs race?
Thou dreadful ſword, wet with Oreſtes' blood,
Expos'd in triumph at the ſacred tomb,
Thou execrable trophy, for a moment
Thou did'ſt deceive me, but thou haſt inſulted
The aſhes of the dead; I'll make thee ſerve
A nobler purpoſe: tho' Ægiſthus hides
His guilty head, and with the queen in ſecret
Plans future crimes, and meditates deſtruction,
Still we may find the murth'rer of Oreſtes:
I cannot bathe me in the blood of both
My tyrants, but of one at leaſt my ſoul
Shall be reveng'd.

IPHISA.

I cannot blame the grief
Which I partake; but hear me, hear the voice

Of reaſon; ev'ry tongue ſpeaks of Oreſtes;
They ſay, he lives, and the king's fears confirm it.
You ſaw Pammenes talking with this ſtranger
In ſecret, ſaw his ardent zeal to ſerve
And to attend him: think'ſt thou, our beſt friend,
Our comforter, the good old man, wou'd e'er
Aſſociate with a murth'rer? never, never,
He cou'd not be ſo baſe.

ELECTRA.

He may be falſe,
Or weak; old age is eaſily deceiv'd:
We are betray'd by all; I know we are:
Did not the cruel ſtranger boaſt his deed?
Did not Ægiſthus yield me up a victim?
Was not Electra made the price of guilt,
The murtherer's reward? Oreſtes calls me
To join him in the tomb: now then, my ſiſter,
If e'er thou lov'dſt Electra, pity her
In her laſt moments; bloody they muſt be,
And terrible. Away; inform thyſelf
Touching Pammenes; ſee if the aſſaſſin
Be with the queen: ſhe flatters all my foes;
She heard unmov'd the murther of her ſon,
And ſeem'd, O gods! a mother ſeem'd, to ſhare
The guilty tranſport with her ſavage lord.

O that this ſword cou'd reach him in her arms,
And pierce the traitor's heart! I'll do't.

IPHISA.

No more:
Indeed you wrong her; for the ſight of him
Offends her: be not thus precipitate
And raſh, Electra; I will to Pammenes,
And talk with him: or I am much deceiv'd,
Or by their ſilence they but mean to hide
Some myſt'ry from us: your imprudent warmth
(Yet who wou'd not forgive it in the wretched?)
Perhaps alarms them, and they wou'd conceal
From you their purpoſe; what it is, I know not:
Pammenes ſeems to ſhun you, let me go
And ſpeak to him; but do not, my Electra,
Hazard a deed thou wilt too late repent of.

SCENE IV.

ELECTRA.

The ſubtle tyrants have gain'd o'er Pammenes;
Old age is weak and fearful: what can faith
Or friendſhip do againſt the hand of pow'r?
Henceforth Electra to herſelf alone
Shall truſt her vengeance: 'tis enough: theſe hands,
Arm'd with deſpair, ſhall act with double vigour.

Ariſe

Ariſe ye furies, leave your dark abode
For ſeats more guilty, and another hell,
Open your dreary caverns, and receive
Your victims; bring your flaming torches here,
Daughters of vengeance, arm yourſelves and me;
Approach, with death and terror in your train;
Oreſtes, Agamemnon, and Electra
Invoke your aid: and lo! they come, I ſee
Their glitt'ring ſwords, and unappall'd behold them;
They are not half ſo dreadful as Ægiſthus:
The murth'rer comes; and ſee, they throng around
him;
Hell points him out, and yields him to my vengeance.

SCENE V.

ELECTRA, at the bottom of the ſtage.

ORESTES, on the other ſide at a diſtance from her.

ORESTES.

Where am I? hither they directed me:
O my dear country! and thou, fatal ſpot
That gave me birth, thou great but guilty race
Of Tantalus, for ever ſhall thy blood
Be wretched? horror here on ev'ry ſide
Surrounds me: wherefore am I puniſh'd thus?
What have I done? why muſt Oreſtes ſuffer
For his forefather's crimes?

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

[Advancing a little from the bottom of the ſtage.

What pow'r withholds me?
I cannot lift my arm againſt him; but
I will go on.

ORESTES.

Methought I heard a voice:
O my dear father, ever-honour'd ſhade,
Much injur'd Agamemnon, did'ſt thou groan?

ELECTRA.

Juſt heav'n! durſt he pronounce that ſacred name?
And ſee he weeps: can ſighs and penitence
Find entrance here? but what is his remorſe
To the dire horrors that Electra feels!

[She comes forward.

He is alone; now ſtrike — die, traitor — O
I cannot ——

ORESTES.

Gods! Electra, art thou here,
Furious and trembling?

ELECTRA.

Sure thou art ſome god
Who thus unnerv'ſt me: — thou haſt ſlain my brother:
I wou'd have ta'en thy life for't; but the ſword
Dropp'd from my hand; thy genius hath prevail'd;
I yield to thee, and muſt betray my brother.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Betray him, no! O why am I reſtraind? ——

ELECTRA.

At ſight of thee my reſolution dies,
And all is chang'd: coud it be thou who fill'd
My ſoul with terror?

ORESTES.

O I wou'd repay
Thy precious tears with hazard of my life.

ELECTRA.

Methought I heard thee ſpeak of Agamemnon.
O gentle youth, deceive me not, but ſpeak:
For I had well nigh done a deſperate deed;
O ſhew me all the guilt of it! explain
The myſt'ry; tell me who thou art.

ORESTES.

O ſiſter
Of dear Oreſtes, fly from me, avoid me.

ELECTRA.

But wherefore! ſpeak.

ORESTES.

No more: — I am — take heed
They ſee us not together.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Gracious heav'n!
Thou fill'ſt my heart with terror and with joy.

ORESTES.

O if thou lov'ſt thy brother ——

ELECTRA.

Love him! yes:
And O in thee I hear a father's voice,
And ſee his features; nature hath unveil'd
The myſt'ry: O be kind and ſpeak for her,
Do not deny it; ſay thou art my brother:
Thou art, I know thou art—my dear Oreſtes;
How cou'd a ſiſter ſeek thy precious life?

ORESTES. [Embracing her.

Heav'n threats in vain, and nature will prevail:
Electra is more pow'rful than the gods.

ELECTRA.

The gods have giv'n a ſiſter to thy vows,
And doſt thou fear their wrath?

ORESTES.

Their cruel orders
Wou'd have depriv'd me of my dear Electra,
And may perhaps chaſtiſe a brother's weakneſs.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Thy weakneſs there was virtue; O rejoice
With me, Oreſtes; wherefore woudſt thou force me
To that raſh act? it might have coſt thee dear.

ORESTES.

I've broke my ſacred promiſe.

ELECTRA.

'Twas thy duty.

ORESTES.

A ſecret truſted to me by the gods.

ELECTRA.

I drew it from thee; I extorted it;
Mine be the guilt; an oath more ſacred far
Binds me to vengeance: what haſt thou to fear?

ORESTES.

My deſtiny, the oracles, the blood
From whence I ſprung.

ELECTRA.

That blood henceforth ſhall flow
In purer ſtreams; haſte then, and join with me
To ſcourge the guilty; oracles and gods
Are all propitious to our great deſign,
And the ſame pow'r that ſav'd will guide Oreſtes.

SCENE

SCENE VI.

ELECTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES,

ELECTRA.

Rejoice with me, my friends, for I have found
My dear Oreſtes.

PYLADES. [To Oreſtes.

Haſt thou then reveal'd
The dang'rous ſecret? Coud'ſt thou think—

ORESTES.

If heav'n
Expects obedience, it muſt give us laws
We can obey.

ELECTRA.

Can'ſt thou reproach him thus
Only for making poor Electra happy?
Woud'ſt thou adopt the cruel ſentiments
Of perſecuting foes, and hide Oreſtes
From my embraces? what unjuſt decree,
What harſh commands—

PYLADES.

I meant to ſave him for thee,
That he might live, and be thy great avenger.

PAMMENES.

Princeſs, thou know'ſt, in this deteſted place
They watch thee nearly; ev'ry ſigh is heard,
And *ev'ry motion* carefully obſerv'd:

Thoſe

Thoſe private friends, whoſe humble ſtate eludes
The tyrants ſearch, adore this noble youth,
And wou'd have ſerv'd him; ev'ry thing's prepar'd;
But thy imprudence now will hazard all.

ELECTRA.

Did not Ægiſthus give me to a hand,
Stain'd, as he thought, with my Oreſtes' blood?

[To Oreſtes.

Thou art my maſter; I am bound to ſerve thee;
I will obey the tyrant; his commands,
For once, are welcome, and the proſpect brightens
On ev'ry ſide.

PAMMENES.

It may be clouded ſoon,
Ægiſthus is alarm'd, and we have cauſe
To tremble; if he but ſuſpects us, death
Muſt be our portion, therefore let us part.

PYLADES. [To Pammenes.

Hence, good Pammenes, bring our friends together,
The hours are precious; haſte and finiſh ſoon
Thy noble work; 'tis time we ſhou'd appear,
And—like ourſelves.

SCENE

SCENE VII.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

Slaves, execute your office,
And bear theſe traitors to the dungeon.

ORESTES.

Once
There rul'd o'er Argos thoſe who better knew
The rights of hoſpitality.

PYLADES.

Ægiſthus,
What is our crime? Inform us, and at leaſt
Reſpect this noble youth.

ÆGISTHUS.

Away with them;
Ye ſtand aghaſt, as if ye fear'd to touch
His ſacred perſon: hence, I ſay, take heed
Ye diſobey me not: guards, drag them off.

ELECTRA.

O ſtay, barbarian, ſtay; for heav'n itſelf
Pleads for their ſacred lives—they tear them from me,
O gods!

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Electra, tremble for thyſelf,
Perfidious as thou art, and dread my wrath.

SCENE VIII.

ELECTRA, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

ELECTRA.

O hear me, if thou art a mother, hear;
Let me recall thy former tenderneſs,
Forgive my guilty rage, the ſad effect
Of unexampled ſorrows; to complain,
Is ſtill, the mournful privilege of grief:
Pity theſe wretched ſtrangers; heav'n perhaps,
Whoſe dreadful vengeance thou ſo long haſt fear'd,
May for their ſakes forgive thy paſt offences;
The pardon thou beſtow'ſt on them may plead
For thee: O ſave 'em, ſave 'em.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Why ſhoud'ſt thou
Be thus ſolicitous? What int'reſt prompts
Thy ardent zeal?

ELECTRA.

Thou ſee'ſt, the gods protect them,
Who ſav'd them from the Ocean's boiſt'rous rage,
And brought them here: heav'n gives them to thy care,

And

And will require them at thy hands—to one,
O if they knew'ſt him—but they both are wretched.
Are we in Argos, or at Tauris, where
The cruel prieſteſs bids her altar's ſmoke
With ſtranger's blood? What muſt I do to ſave them?
Command, and I obey: to Pliſthenes
You'd have me wedded; I ſubmit, tho' death
Were far more welcome; lead me to his bed.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

You mean to mock us: know'ſt thou not, he's dead?

ELECTRA.

Juſt heav'n! and hath Ægiſthus loſt a ſon?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I ſee the joy that ſparkles in thy eyes;
Thou'rt pleas'd to hear it.

ELECTRA.

No: I am too wretched
To be delighted with another's woe:
I pity the unhappy, nor wou'd ſhed
The blood of innocence: O ſave the ſtrangers!
I aſk no more.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Away: I underſtand thee,
And know thee but too well; thou haſt confirm'd

5903338

The king's ſuſpicions, and reveal'd the ſecret:
One of theſe ſtrangers is—Oreſtes.

ELECTRA.

Well,
Suppoſe it were; ſuppoſe that gracious heav'n,
In tender pity, had reſtor'd thy ſon——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O dreadful moment! how am I to act?

ELECTRA.

Is it a doubt, and can'ſt thou heſitate?
Thy ſon! O heav'n! think on his paſt misfortunes,
Think on his merits; but if ſtill thy mind
Is doubtful, all is loſt: farewell Oreſtes.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I'm not in doubt; I am reſolv'd; ev'n thou,
With all thy fury, can'ſt not change the love,
The tenderneſs I bear him: I will guard,
Save, and protect him—he may puniſh me,
Perhaps he will; I tremble at his name;
No matter—I'm a mother ſtill, and love
My children; thou may'ſt yet preſerve thy hate.

ELECTRA.

No: I will fall ſubmiſſive at thy feet,
And thank thy bounty: now, indulgent heav'n,

Thy

Thy mercy ſhines ſuperior to thy wrath;
For thou haſt giv'n a mother to my vows,
Chang'd her reſentful heart, and ſav'd Oreſtes.

END of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

ELECTRA.

I AM forbid to enter here; oppreſs'd
With fears, in vain I lift theſe hands to heav'n:
Iphiſa comes not; but behold the gates
Are open'd: ha! ſhe's here, I tremble.

SCENE II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

Say,
My dear Iphiſa, what have I to hope,
Will Clytemnæſtra dare to be a mother?
Has ſhe the pow'r, has ſhe the will to make us
Some poor amends for all the cruel evils
She has inflicted on us? Cou'd ſhe e'er ———
But ſhe's a ſlave to guilt, and to Ægiſthus:

I am prepar'd to hear the worſt; O ſpeak,
Say, all is paſt, and we muſt die.

IPHISA.

I hope,
And yet I fear: Ægiſthus hath receiv'd
Some dark ſuggeſtions, but is doubtful ſtill,
Whether Oreſtes is his pris'ner here,
And Clytemneſtra never named her ſon.
She ſeems to feel a mother's fondneſs for him,
And, pierc'd with anguiſh, trembles for his life:
She ſtruggles with herſelf, and fears alike
To ſpeak or to be ſilent; ſtrives to ſooth
The tyrants rage, and ſave them from his vengeance:
But ſhou'd Oreſtes once be known, he dies.

ELECTRA.

O cruel thought! perhaps when I implor'd
My barb'rous mother I deſtroy'd Oreſtes;
Her grief will but enrage the fierce Ægiſthus;
Nature is ever fatal here: I dread
Her ſilence, and yet wou'd not have her ſpeak;
Danger's on ev'ry ſide: but ſay, Iphiſa,
What hath Pammenes done?

IPHISA.

His feeble age
Seems ſtrengthen'd by misfortune, and our dangers

But breath new ſpirit o'er his ardent zeal
To ſerve our cauſe; he animates our friends
With double vigor; ev'n the ſervile throng,
That cringe around the tyrant's throne, begin
To murmur at the name of great Oreſtes:
Vet'rans, who ſerv'd beneath the father, burn
With honeſt ardor to ſupport the ſon:
Such pow'r have juſtice and the ſacred laws
O'er mortal minds, howe'er by vice corrupted.

ELECTRA.

O that Electra cou'd enflame their ſouls
With glowing virtue, breath her own fierce ſpirit
Into their timid hearts, and animate
Their cold reſentment! wou'd I had but known,
E'er he arriv'd on this deteſted ſhore,
That my Oreſtes liv'd! or that Pammenes
Had further urg'd ——

SCENE III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

Guards, ſeize that hoary traitor,
And let him be confronted with thoſe ſtrangers
Whom I have doom'd to death; he is their friend,

And confident, th'accomplice in their crimes:
How dreadful was the ſnare which they had laid!
O, Clytemnæſtra, 'tis the curs'd Oreſtes,
It muſt be he; do not deceive thyſelf,
Do not defend him: O I ſee it all,
It is too plain: alas! this urn contains
The aſhes of my ſon: the murth'rers brought
This fatal preſent to his weeping father.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Can'ſt thou believe ———

ÆGISTHUS.

I can; I muſt rely
On the ſworn hatred 'twixt th'unhappy children
Of Atreus and Thyeſtes; muſt believe
The time, the place, the rage of fierce Electra,
Iphiſa's tears, your undeſerv'd compaſſion,
Your ill-tim'd pity for theſe baſe aſſaſſins;
Oreſtes lives, and I have loſt my ſon;
But I have caught him in the toils; whiche'er
It be, for yet I know not, I'll be juſt,
I'll ſacrifice the murth'rer to my ſon,
And to his mother.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Horrid ſacrifice!
I muſt not ſee it

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Horrible to thee?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O yes; already blood enough hath flow'd
In this ſad ſcene of ſlaughter: O 'tis time
To end the woes of Pelops' hapleſs race:
If after all it ſhou'd not be Oreſtes,
Woud'ſt thou, on dark ſuſpicion's vague report,
Murther the innocent? and if it be
Indeed my ſon, my lord, I muſt defend him,
Muſt gain his pardon at thy hands, or periſh.

ÆGISTHUS.

I cannot, dare not yield to thy requeſt;
For thy own ſake I dare not; thy fond pity
May be thy ruin; all that melts thy heart
To ſoft compaſſion, ſharpens mine to rage
And fierce reſentment: one of them I know
Muſt be Oreſtes, therefore both ſhall die;
I ought not ev'n to heſitate a moment:
Guards, do your office.

IPHISA.

O, my lord, behold me
Low at your feet; muſt all our hapleſs race
Thus humbly bend, thus ſupplicate in vain?

Electra, kneel with me, embrace his knees,
Thy pride deſtroys us.

ELECTRA.

Can I ſtoop ſo low?
Shall I bring foul diſgrace on thee, my brother,
And ignominy, and ſhame? it ſhocks my ſoul;
But I will ſuffer all to ſave Oreſtes.

[Turning to Ægiſthus.

If thou wilt ſave him, here I promiſe thee,
(Not to forget my father's murther, that
I never can, but) in reſpectful ſilence
To pay thee homage, ſtill to live with thee
A willing ſlave, let but my brother live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thy brother dies, and thou ſhalt live a ſlave;
My vengeance is complete: thy pride is humbled,
And ſues in vain.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Ægiſthus, 'tis too much,
To trample thus on the unhappy race
Of him who was thy maſter once; away,
Spite of thy rage, I will defend my ſon;
Deaf as thou art to a fond ſiſter's pray'rs,
A mother's may prevail: O think, my lord,
Think on thy happy ſtate, above the reach
Of adverſe fortune now, Oreſtes ne'er

Can hurt thee, and Electra bends ſubmiſſive
Beneath thy pow'r, Iphiſa at thy feet;
Can nothing move thee? I have gone too far
Already with thee in the paths of guilt,
And offer'd up a dreadful ſacrifice.
Think'ſt thou I'll yield thee up my pureſt blood
To glut thy rage? Am I for ever doom'd
To take a murth'rous huſband to my arms?
At Aulis one a lovely daughter ſlew,
The other threatens to deſtroy my ſon
Before my eyes, cloſe to his father's tomb:
O rather let this fatal diadem,
Hateful to Greece, and to myſelf a load
Of mis'ry, fall with me, and be no more
Remember'd! O Ægiſthus, well thou know'ſt,
I lov'd thee, 'tis amongſt my blackeſt crimes,
And ſtands the foremoſt; but I love my children,
And will defend them; 'gainſt thy arm uprais'd
To ſhed their blood will lift my vengeful hand,
And blaſt thy purpoſe: tremble, for thou know'ſt me:
The bands are ſacred that united us,
Thy int'reſt is moſt dear to Clytemnæſtra:
Remember ſtill, Oreſtes is my ſon,
And fear his mother.

ELECTRA.

You ſurpaſs my hopes.
Surely a heart like thine cou'd ne'er be guilty;
Go on, my honour'd mother, and revenge
Your children, and your huſband.

ÆGISTHUS.

Slave, thou fill'ſt
The meaſure of thy crimes: gods! ſhall Ægiſthus
With-hold his vengeance for a woman's cries,
For Agamemnon's widow, and her children?
Unhappy queen! ſay, whom doſt thou accuſe?
Whom doſt thou plead for? hear me and obey.
Away with them to inſtant death.

SCENE. IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA, DYMAS.

DYMAS.

My lord?

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou ſeem'ſt diſorder'd: what has happen'd? Speak.

DYMAS.

Oreſtes is diſcover'd.

IPHISA.

Ha! where is he?

CLYTEM-

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

My ſon!

ELECTRA.

My brother?

ÆGISTHUS.

Have you puniſh'd him
As he deſerves?

DYMAS.

My lord, as yet he lives.

ÆGISTHUS.

And wherefore were my orders diſobey'd?

DYMAS.

His friend and fellow-captive, Pylades,
Pointed him out, and to the ſoldiers ſhew'd
Great Agamemnon's ſon; they ſeem'd much mov'd;
I dread the conſequence.

ÆGISTHUS.

I muſt prevent it,
For they ſhall die: who dares not to revenge me,
Shall feel my juſtice: Dymas, follow me:
Stay thou and guard his ſiſters; I defy
The blood of Agamemnon: from the father
Of Pliſthenes, and great Thyeſtes' ſon,
What mortal, or what god, ſhall ſave Oreſtes?

SCENE

SCENE V.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

Fear not, but follow him; Electra, ſpeak,
Exhort our friends, and animate their zeal.

ELECTRA.

[To Clytemnæſtra.

O in the name of pow'rful nature, now
Complete thy noble work; conduct us, fly ——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

You muſt not hence, the guards will not permit it:
Stay here, my children, and rely on me,
On a fond mother, and a tender wife:
I will perform the double taſk, and take
Oreſtes and Ægiſthus to my care.

SCENE VI.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

Alas! th' avenging god purſues us ſtill;
Though ſhe defends Oreſtes, ſtill Ægiſthus
Is at her heart; perhaps the tender cries
Of pity and remorſe ſhall nought avail
Againſt the tyrant; he is proud, revengeful,
Implacable,

Implacable, and furious; who ſhall ſave
If he condemns? we muſt ſubmit, and die.

ELECTRA.

O that before my death I had not fall'n
So low as to intreat him, to bely
My honeſt heart, and ſupplicate the tyrant!
Deſpair and horror ſink me to the tomb
With infamy and ſhame; my vain endeavours
To ſave Oreſtes but urge on his fate.
Where are theſe boaſted friends Pammenes talk'd of,
Who, with fell rancour, and determin'd hate,
Purſued Ægiſthus? Where thoſe vengeful gods
Who hid Oreſtes from my ſight, uprais'd
His righteous arm, and promis'd to ſupport him?
Where are ye now, infernal goddeſſes,
Daughters of night, ye who ſo lately ſhook
Your dreadful torches here? all nature once
United ſeem'd to guard and to protect us,
But all deſert us now, all court Ægiſthus,
And men and gods, and heav'n and hell betray me.

SCENE VII.

ELECTRA, PYLADES, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

What ſay'ſt thou, Pylades? the deed is done?

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

It is: Electra's free, and heav'n obey'd.

ELECTRA.

How?

PYLADES.

Yes, Oreſtes reigns: he ſent me hither.

IPHISA.

Juſt gods!

ELECTRA.

Oreſtes! is it poſſible!
I faint, I die with joy.

PYLADES.

Oreſtes lives,
And has reveng'd the blood of innocence.

ELECTRA.

What wond'rous pow'r hath wrought this ſtrange event.

PYLADES.

His father's name, Electra's, and his own;
His valour, and his virtue; our misfortunes,
Juſtice, and pity; and the pow'r that pleads
In human hearts for wretchedneſs like thine.
Pammenes, by the tyrant's order bound,
Was led with us to death; in weeping crouds
The people follow'd, and deplor'd our fate:

I ſaw their rage was equal to their fears,
But the guards watch'd them cloſely: then Oreſtes
Cry'd, ſtrike, ye ſlaves, and ſacrifice the laſt
Of Argos' kings; ye dare not: when he ſpoke,
On his fair front ſuch native majeſty
And royal luſtre ſhone, we almoſt thought
Great Agamemnon's ſpirit from the tomb
Had ris'n, and came once more came to bleſs mankind.
I ſpoke, and friendſhip's happy voice prevail'd;
The people roſe, the ſoldiers ſtood aghaſt,
And dropp'd th' uplifted falchions from their hands;
The croud encircled us, and deſp'rate love,
With friendſhip join'd, fought nobly for Oreſtes;
The joyful people bore him off in triumph:
Ægiſthus flew to ſeize his deſtin'd prey,
And in the ſlave he meant to puniſh, found
A conqu'ror: pleas'd I ſaw his humbled pride;
His friends deſerted, and his guards betray'd him:
Th' inſulting people triumph'd in his fall.
O glorious day! O all diſcerning juſtice!
Ægiſthus wears the chains that bound Oreſtes;
The queen alone attends, protects, and ſaves him
From the mad croud, that preſs tumultuous on,
Big with revenge, and thirſting for his blood;

Whilſt Clytemnæſtra holds him in her arms,
And ſhields him from their rage, implores Oreſtes
To ſave her huſband: he reſpects her ſtill,
Fulfills the duties of a ſon and brother:
Safe from the foe you will behold him ſoon
Triumphant here, a conqu'ror and a king.

IPHISA.

Let us away, to greet the lov'd Oreſtes,
And comfort our afflicted mother.

ELECTRA.

Gods!
What unexpected bliſs! O Pylades,
Thou beſt of friends, thou kind protector, haſte,
Let us begone.

PYLADES.

[To his attendants.
Take off thoſe ſhameful bonds;

[They take off her chains.
Fall from her hands, ye chains, for they were made
To wield a ſceptre.

SCENE VIII.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

ELECTRA.

O Pammenes, where,
Where's my Oreſtes, my deliverer?
Why comes he not?

PAMMENES.

PAMMENES.

This is a dreadful moment,
And full of terror, for his father's ſpirit
Demands a ſacrifice, and juſtice waits
To pay it, ſo hath heav'n decreed: this tomb
Muſt be the altar where the victim's blood
Shall ſoon be ſhed; that ſacred duty done,
He will attend thee; but thou muſt not ſee
A ſight ſo terrible: thou know'ſt the laws
Of Argos ſuffer not thy ſpotleſs hands
To join with his e'er the appointed time.

IPHISA.

But ſay, Pammenes, what of Clytemnæſtra,
How acts ſhe in this dreadful criſis?

PAMMENES.

Vainly
She deprecates the wrath of fierce Oreſtes,
And ſtrives to ſave Ægiſthus; kneels for pardon,
And craves that boon ſhe never will obtain:
Meantime the furies, deaf to her intreaties,
And thirſting for the cruel murth'rer's blood,
Throng round Oreſtes, and demand his life.

IPHISA.

O may this day of terror be a day
Of pardon and forgiveneſs; may it finiſh

To

The cruel woes of our unhappy race!
Hark, Pylades, Electra, heard ye not
A dreadful groan?

ELECTRA.

My mother's ſure.

PAMMENES.

'Tis ſhe.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA. [Behind the ſcenes.

O ſpare me!

IPHISA.

Heav'n!

CLYTEMNÆSTRA. [Behind the ſcenes.

My ſon!

ELECTRA.

He kills Ægiſthus.
O hear her not, Oreſtes, but go on,
Revenge, revenge, diſſolve the horrid tie,
And ſacrifice the murth'rer in her arms:
Strike deep.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

My ſon! O, thou haſt ſlain thy mother.

PYLADES.

O cruel fate!

IPHISA.

O guilt!

ELECTRA.

O wretched brother!
Crimes puniſh crimes; for ever be this day
Lamented by us!

SCENE

SCENE IX.

To them ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Open wide, thou earth,
And ſwallow me: O Clytemnæſtra, Atreus,
And Tantalus, I come, I follow you
To Erebus, a part'ner in your crimes,
To ſhare your tortures.

ELECTRA.

O what haſt thou done?

ORESTES.

She ſtrove to ſave him, and I ſmote them both——
I can no more——

ELECTRA.

She fell then by thy hand!
O dreadful ſtroke! and coud'ſt thou——

ORESTES.

'Twas not I;
'Twas not Oreſtes; ſome malignant pow'r
Guided my hand, the hateful inſtrument
Of heav'ns eternal wrath: Oreſtes lives
But to be wretched: baniſh'd from my country,
When my dear father fell, my mother ſlain,
And by my hand; an exile from the world,

Bereft

Bereft of parents, country, fortune, friends,
Now muſt I wander: all is loſt to me:
O thou bright orb, thou ever glorious ſun,
Shocked at our crimes, and Atreus's horrid feaſt,
Thou didſt withdraw thy beams, and yet thou ſhin'ſt
On me! O wherefore in eternal night
Doſt thou not bury all? O tyrant gods,
Mercileſs pow'rs, who puniſh'd me for guilt
Yourſelves commanded, O for what new crime
Am I reſerv'd? ſpeak—ye pronounce the name
Of Tauris, there I'll ſeek the murth'rous prieſteſs,
Who offers blood alone to th'angry gods,
To gods leſs cruel, leſs unjuſt than you.

ELECTRA.

Stay, and conjure their juſtice and their hate.

PYLADES.

Where'er the gods may lead, thy Pylades
Shall follow ſtill, and friendſhip triumph o'er
The woes of mortals, and the wrath of heav'n.

END of the FIFTH and laſt ACT.

THE

PRODIGAL.

A

COMEDY.

Repreſented October 10th, 1736.

THE EDITOR's PREFACE

To the Edition printed in 1737.

IT is pretty extraordinary, that this comedy ſhou'd never yet have made its appearance in print, as it is now almoſt two years ſince it was firſt play'd, and ran about thirty nights: as the author of it was not known, it has hitherto been attributed to ſeveral perſons of the firſt character; but it was indiſputably written by Mr. de *Voltaire*, though the ſtile of the *Henriade* and *Alzira* are ſo extremely different from the ſtile of this, that we cannot eaſily conceive them to be the product of the ſame pen.

In

In his name we have here preſented it to the public, as the firſt comedy ever written in * verſes conſiſting of five feet; a novelty which may perhaps induce other authors to make uſe of this meaſure: it will at leaſt be productive of variety on the French theatre, and whoever gives us new pleaſures, has always a right to a favourable reception.

If comedy ſhou'd be an exact repreſentation of manners, this piece has ſufficient merit to recommend it: we ſee in the *Prodigal* a mixture of the ſerious and pleaſant; the comic, and the affecting: thus the life of man itſelf is always checquer'd, and ſometimes even a ſingle incident will produce all theſe contraſts. Nothing more common than a family, wherein the

* It is aſtoniſhing that it ſhou'd ever enter into the head of a Dramatic writer to put his comedies into rhyme; but it is ſtill more aſtoniſhing that the ſenſible and ingenious Voltaire ſhou'd adopt a cuſtom ſo ridiculous: the confining his verſes to five feet, has certainly nothing but the novelty to recommend it; they are even perhaps more faulty than if they had fifteen, by the quicker return of the ſame ſounds to our ear. What pleaſure a French author, or a French audience, might take in them, we cannot pretend to determine; but they are certainly very perplexing to a tranſlator, who finds it extremely difficult to reduce poetic language, and high-flown metaphors, to eaſy and familiar dialogue, without departing too much from the original. The Engliſh reader will frequently, I am afraid, meet with a ſtiffneſs of ſtile in this comedy, which, with all the pains I have taken, it was impoſſible to avoid: add to this, that the names of *Fierenfat*, *Life*, *Martha*, &c. ſound but uncouthly to us; and to change them, was a liberty which I thought a tranſlator had no right to take.

father

father grumbles, the daughter, who is in love, whimpers, the ſon laughs at them both, and the relations take different parts as it happens to ſuit their inclinations; we often make a joke of that in one room, which we cry at in the next: nay, the ſame perſon has often laugh'd and cry'd at the ſame thing within a quarter of an hour.

A certain lady of faſhion, being one day at the bedſide of her daughter, who lay dangerouſly ill, with all the family about her, burſt into a flood of tears, and cry'd out, *O my God, my God, reſtore me my dear daughter, and take all my other children:* a gentleman, who had marry'd one of her daughters, came up to her immediately, and taking her by the ſleeve, *pray, madam*, ſays he, *do you include your ſons in law?* The arch dryneſs with which he ſpoke thoſe words had ſuch an effect on the afflicted lady, that ſhe burſt into a loud laugh, and went out; the company follow'd her, and laugh'd too; and the ſick perſon, as ſoon as ſhe heard the cauſe of their mirth, laugh'd more heartily than all the reſt.

We don't mean to infer from this, that every comedy ſhou'd have ſome ſcenes of humour and drollery, and others ſerious and affecting: there are a great many good pieces where there is nothing but gaiety, others

intirely ſerious; others where they are mix'd, and others where the tender and pathetic are carry'd ſo far as to produce tears. Neither of theſe different ſpecies ſhou'd be excluded from the ſtage; and if I was to be aſk'd, which is the beſt of them, I ſhou'd ſay, that which was beſt executed.

It wou'd perhaps be agreeable to the preſent taſte for *reaſoning*, and not unſuitable to this occaſion, to examine here, what kind of pleaſantry that is which makes us laugh in a comedy. The cauſe of laughter is one of thoſe things which are eaſier felt than expreſs'd: the admirable *Moliere*, *Regnard*, who is ſometimes almoſt as admirable as *Moliere*, and the authors of ſeveral excellent *petites pieces*, have contented themſelves with raiſing this pleaſing ſenſation without explaining to us the reaſons of it, or telling their ſecret.

I have obſerv'd, with regard to the ſtage, that violent peals of univerſal laughter ſeldom riſe but from ſome *miſtake*. *Mercury* taken for *Soſia*; *Menechmes* for his brother; *Criſpin* making his own will under the name of old maſter *Geronte*; *Valere* talking to *Harpagon* of the beauty of his daughter, whilſt *Harpagon* imagines he is talking of the beauty of his ſtrong box; *Pourceaugnac*, when they feel his pulſe, and want to

make

make him paſs for a madam: in a word, miſtakes of this kind are generally the only things that excite laughter: Harlequin ſeldom raiſes a ſmile, except when he make[s] ſome bl.nder; and this accounts for the propriety of the name of *Balourd*, uſually given to him.

There are a great many other ſpecies of the comic, and pleaſantries, that cauſe a different ſort of entertainment; but I never ſaw what we call laughing from the bottom of one's ſoul, either on the ſtage, or in company, except in caſes nearly reſembling thoſe which I juſt now mention'd: there are ſeveral ridiculous characters which pleaſe, without cauſing that immoderate laughter of joy. *Triſſotin* and *Vadius*, for example, are of this kind: the *Gameſter*, and the *Grumbler* likewiſe, give us inexpreſſible pleaſure, but never cauſe any burſts of laughter.

There are beſides other characters of ridicule, that have in them a mixture of vice, which we love to ſee well painted, though they only give us a ſerious pleaſure: a bad man will never makes us laugh, becauſe laughter always ariſes from a gaiety of diſpoſition, abſolutely incompatible with contempt and indignation: it is true, indeed, we laugh at *Tartuffe*, but not at his hypocriſy; it is at the miſtake of the good old gentleman, who takes him for a ſaint: the hypocriſy

once diſcover'd we laugh no longer, but feel very different impreſſions.

One might eaſily trace the ſpring of every other ſentiment, and ſhew the cauſe of gaiety, curioſity, intereſt, emotion, and tears. It wou'd be a proper employment for ſome of our dramatic authors to lay open theſe ſecret ſprings, as they are the perſons who put them in motion: but they are too buſy in moving the paſſions, to find time for an examination into them: they know that one ſentiment is worth a hundred definitions, and I am too much of their opinion to prefix a treatiſe of philoſophy to a dramatic performance: I ſhall content myſelf with only inſiſting a little on the neceſſity we are under of having ſomething new. If we had never brought any thing into the tragic ſcene but the Roman grandeur, it wou'd have grown at leaſt very diſguſtful; and if our heroes had breath'd nothing but love and tenderneſs, we ſhou'd by this time have been heartily ſick of them:

O imitatores ſervum pecus!

The works which we have ſeen ſince the times of *Corneille*, *Moliere*, *Racine*, *Quinaut*, *Lulli*, and *le Brun*, ſeem to me all of them to have ſomething new

and

and original, which has ſav'd them from contempt and oblivion: once more therefore I repeat it, every ſpecies is good, but that which tires us: we ſhou'd never therefore ſay, ſuch a piece of muſic did not ſucceed, ſuch a picture was not agreeable, ſuch a play was damn'd, becauſe it was of a new kind; but ſuch or ſuch a thing fail'd, beeauſe it was really good for nothing.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Old EUPHEMON.
Young EUPHEMON.
FIERENFAT, Preſident of Cognac, ſecond ſon of Euphemon.
RONDON, a Citizen of Cognac.
LISE, Daughter of Rondon.
MARTHA, Chambermaid to Liſe.
JASMIN, Valet to young Euphemon.

Scène, COGNAC.

THE PRODIGAL.

A COMEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

EUPHEMON, RONDON.

RONDON.

COME, come, chear up, my old melancholy friend, how happy will it make me to ſee you merry again! and merry we will be: what a pleaſure it is to think my daughter will revive your drooping family! But this ſame ſon of ours, this maſter Fierenfat, ſeems to me to behave ſtrangely in the affair.

EUPHEMON.

How ſo!

RONDON.

Puff'd up with his Preſidentſhip, he makes love by weight and meaſure: a young fellow putting on the grey-beard, and dictating to us like a Cato, is, in my opinion, a mighty ridiculous animal; I wou'd prefer a fool to a coxcomb at any time; in ſhort, brother, he is too proud, and ſelf-ſufficient.

EUPHEMON.

And let me tell you, brother, you are a little too haſty.

RONDON.

I can't help it; 'tis my nature: I love truth, I love to hear it, and I love to ſpeak it: I love now and then to reprove my ſon-in-law, to rate him for his coxcomial pedantic airs: to be ſure, you acted like a wiſe father, to turn your eldeſt ſon out of doors; that gameſter, that wild rake-helly profligate, to make room for this prudent younger brother; to place all your hopes on this promiſing youth, and buy a preſidentſhip for him. O 'twas a wiſe act no doubt: but the moment he became Mr. Preſident, by my troth, he was ſtuff'd up with vanity and impertinence: he goes like clock-work, walks and talks in time, and ſays he has a great deal more wit than I have; who, you know, brother, have a great deal more than you: he

is ——

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

Nay, nay, what a ſtrange humour this is! muſt you always be ——

RONDON.

Well, well, no matter; what does it ſignify? all theſe faults are nothing when people are rich: he is, as I was going to ſay, covetous, and every covetous man is wiſe: O 'tis an excellent vice for a huſband, a moſt delightful vice. Come, come, this very day he muſt be my ſon-in-law; Liſe ſhall be his: it only remains now, my dear ſorrowful friend, that you make over all your goods and chattels, hereditary or acquir'd, preſent and future, to your ſon, only reſerving to yourſelf a moderate income: let every thing be ſign'd and ſealed as ſoon as poſſible, that this ſame young gentleman of your's may throw a good fortune into our laps, without which my daughter will moſt certainly look another way for a huſband.

EUPHEMON.

I have promis'd you, Sir, and I will keep my word: yes, Fierenfat ſhall have every thing I am poſſeſs'd of: the ſad remainder of my unhappy life ſhall glide away ſilently in ſome diſtant retreat: but I cannot help wiſhing that one, for whom I deſign my all, was leſs eager to enjoy it: I have ſeen the mad debauchery of

one ſon, and now behold with concern the ſoul of the other devoted to intereſt.

RONDON.

So much the better, man, ſo much the better.

EUPHEMON.

O my dear friend, I was born to be an unfortunate father.

RONDON.

Let me have none of your lamentations, your ſighs, and your groans: what! do you want your eldeſt hopeful to come back, that prodigal ſpendthirft, to ſpoil all our pleaſure at once, and drop in like a trouble-feaſt on the day of marriage?

EUPHEMON.

No: no.

RONDON.

Wou'd you have him come, and ſwear the houſe down?

EUPHEMON.

No.

RONDON.

Beat you, and run away with my daughter, with my dear Liſe; my Liſe, who ——

EUPHEMON.

Long may that charming maid be preſerv'd from *ſuch wicked fellows!*

RONDON.

RONDON.

Do you want him to come again to plunder his father? Do you want to give him your eſtate?

EUPHEMON.

No: no: his brother ſhall have it all.

RONDON.

Ay! or my daughter will have none of him.

EUPHEMON.

To day he ſhall have Life, and all my fortune: his brother will have nothing of me but the anger of a father, whom he hath grievouſly injur'd: he has deſerv'd my hatred; an unnatural boy!

RONDON.

Indeed you bore with him too long; the other at leaſt has acted with diſcretion: but as for him, he was a profligate: my god, what a libertine! Don't you remember, ha! ha! that was a droll trick enough, when he robb'd you of your cloaths, horſes, linnen, and moveables, to equip his little *Jourdain*, who left him the very next morning. Many a time have I laugh'd at that, I own.

EUPHEMON.

O! what pleaſure can you find in repeating my misfortunes?

RONDON.

RONDON.

And then his ſtaking twenty rouleau's upon an ace; O dear! O dear!

EUPHEMON.

Have done with this.

RONDON.

Don't you remember, when he was to have been betroth'd to my little Liſe, in the face of the church, where he had hid himſelf, and upon whoſe account too? —— the debauch'd rogue!

EUPHEMON.

Spare me the remembrance, good Rondon, of theſe unhappy circumſtances, that only ſet his conduct in the worſt light: am I not already unfortunate enough? I left my own houſe, the place of my nativity, on purpoſe to remove as far as poſſible from my thoughts the memory of a misfortune, which, whenever it recurs, diſtracts me. Your buſineſs led you to this place; we have enter'd into a connection with and friendſhip for each other; let me intreat you, Rondon, make the proper uſe of it. You are always repeating truths of ſome kind or other; but let me tell you, truth is not always agreeable.

RONDON.

Well, well, it is agreed; I ſay no more; I aſk pardon; but ſure the devil was in you, when you *knew his violent* temper, to make a ſoldier of him.

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

Again!

RONDON.

Forgive me, but really you ought ——

EUPHEMON.

I know it: I know I ought to forget every thing but my youngeſt ſon, and his marriage: but tell me, ſincerely, Rondon, think you he has been able to gain your daughter's heart?

RONDON.

O no doubt of it: my girl is a girl of honour, and will be obedient to her father: if I tell her ſhe muſt fall in love, her little docile heart, which I can turn and wind juſt as I pleaſe, falls in love immediately, without any arguing about the matter: I know how to manage her, I warrant you.

EUPHEMON.

I have notwithſtanding ſome doubts about her obedience in this affair, and am greatly miſtaken if ſhe anſwers your expectation: my eldeſt ſon had a place in her affections: I know how ſtrong the firſt impreſſions of love are upon a tender heart; they are not worn out in a day; indeed, my friend, they are not.

RONDON.

RONDON.

Nonſenſe, nonſenſe.

EUPHEMON.

Say what you pleaſe, that wild fellow knew how to be agreeable.

RONDON.

Not he indeed: he was nobody: a poor creature: no, no; never you fear that: after his behaviour to you, I bade my daughter never to think of him any more; therefore ſet your heart at reſt. When I ſay no, who ſhall dare to ſay, yes? But you ſhall ſee, here ſhe comes.

SCENE II.

EUPHEMON, RONDON, LISE, MARTHA.

RONDON.

Come hither, my dear: this day, my dear, is a grand holiday for you, I'm ſure; for this day I intend to give you a huſband: now tell me, my little Liſe, be he old or young, handſome or ugly, grave or gay, rich or poor, ſhall not you have the ſtrongeſt deſire to pleaſe him? have not you already an inclination for him? are not you in love with him?

LISE.

No, ſir.

RONDON.

How, gipſy —

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

O ho! my liege: why your power is a little on the decline. What is become of your deſpotic authority!

RONDON.

Ha! how is this! what, after all I ſaid to you, have you no paſſion for your future huſband? no inclination? no——

LISE.

None in the leaſt, ſir.

RONDON.

Don't you know your duty obliges you to give him your whole heart?

LISE.

No, ſir; I tell you, no. I know, ſir, how far a heart, obedient to the dictates of virtue, is oblig'd by the ſolemn tie of marriage. I know, ſir, it is a wife's duty to make herſelf as amiable as poſſible, and to endeavour to deſerve a huſband's tenderneſs; to make amends by goodneſs for what ſhe wants in beauty; abroad to be diſcreet, and prudent; at home, affable, and agreeable; but, as for love, 'tis quite another thing: it will not endure ſlavery: inclination can never be forc'd, therefore never attempt it: to my huſband I ſhall yield up every thing—but my heart, and that he muſt deſerve before he can poſſeſs it: depend upon it, that heart will never be taught to love

by

by the command of a father; no, nor be argued into it by reaſon, nor frighten'd into it by a lawyer.

EUPHEMON.

In my opinion, the girl talks ſenſibly, and I approve the juſtice of her argument: my ſon, I hope, will endeavour to make himſelf worthy of a heart ſo noble, and ſo generous.

RONDON.

Hold your tongue, you old doting flatterer, you corrupter of youth: without your encouragement, the girl wou'd never have thought of prating to me in this ridiculous manner.

[To Life.

Hark, ye, miſs, I have provided you a huſband, perhaps he may have a little of the coxcomb, and take upon him rather too much; but it is my buſineſs to correct my ſon-in-law, and yours to take him, ſuch as he is: to love one another as well as you can, and obey me in every thing, that's all you have to do: and now, brother, let us go ſign and ſeal with my ſcrivener, who will give us a hundred words where four wou'd be ſufficient: come, let us away, and rattle the old brawler: then will I come back, and ſcold my ſon, and your daughter, and yourſelf.

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

Mighty well, ſir: come along.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

My god! what an odd mixture it is! how ſtrangely the old gentleman jumbles his ideas together!

LISE.

I am his daughter ſtill; and his odd humours, after all, don't alter the goodneſs of his heart. Under this violence of paſſion, and air of reſentment, he has ſtill the ſoul of a father; nay, ſometimes, even in the mid'ſt of his freaks, and whilſt he is ſcolding me, he will take my advice: to be ſure, when he finds fault with the huſband he has provided for me, and tells me of the hazard I run in ſuch a marriage, he is but too much in the right: but when, at the ſame time, he lays his commands on me to love him, then indeed he is moſt miſerably wrong.

MARTHA.

How is it poſſible you ſhou'd ever love this Monſ. Fierenfat? I'd ſooner marry an old ſoldier, that ſwears, gets drunk, beats his wife, and yet loves her, than a coxcomb of the long robe, fond of nobody but himſelf;

when

who, with a grave tone and pedantic air, talks to his wife as if he was examining her in a court of juſtice; a peacock that's always looking at his own tail, who bridles under his band, and admires himſelf; a wretch who has even more covetouſneſs than pride, and makes love to you as he counts out his money.

LISE.

Thou haſt painted him to the life; but what can I do? I muſt ſubmit to this marriage: we are not the diſpoſers of our own fate: my parents, my fortune, my age, all conſpire to force me into the bonds of wedlock. This Fierenfat, in ſpite of my diſlike of him, is the only man here who can be my huſband: he is the ſon of my father's friend, and I can't poſſibly ſhake him off. Alas! how few hearts are beſtow'd according to our own inclinations! I muſt yield: time and patience perhaps may conquer my diſguſt of him; I may reconcile myſelf to the yoke, and come at laſt to paſs over his faults as I do my own.

MARTHA.

Mighty well reſolv'd indeed, my beautiful and diſcreet miſtreſs: but your heart, I am afraid, is not quite ſo open — O if I dar'd — but you have forbad my ever mentioning —

LISE.

LISE.

Whom?

MARTHA.

Euphemon — who, ſpite of all his vices, I know, had once an int'reſt in your heart; who lov'd you.

LISE.

O never, never: mention no more a name which I deteſt.

MARTHA. [Going off.

Well, well, I ſay no more about him.

LISE. [Pulling her back.

It is true, his youth did for a little time betray me into a tenderneſs for him; but was he form'd to make a virtuous woman happy?

MARTHA. [Going.

A dangerous fool indeed, madam.

LISE. [Pulling her back.

He met with too many corruptors to lead him aſtray, unhappy youth! he took his round of pleaſures, but knew little, I believe, of love.

MARTHA,

And yet there was a time when you ſeem'd to think you had caught him in the toils.

LISE.

If he had really lov'd, it might have reform'd him; for, believe me, a real paſſion without diſguiſe, is the beſt curb on vice; and he who feels it, either is a worthy man, or ſoon will be ſo: but Euphemon deſpis'd his miſtreſs, left love and tenderneſs for folly and debauchery. Thoſe worthleſs villains, who pretended to be his friends, and drew him into the ſnare, after having exauſted all his mother's fortune, robb'd his unhappy father, and laid it upon him: to complete his miſery, thoſe vile ſeducers took him away from his father's protection, and ſnatch'd him from me; hid him for ever from theſe eyes, which, bath'd in tears, ſtill lament his vices and his charms. I think no more about him.

MARTHA.

His brother, it ſeems, ſucceeds to his fortunes, and is to marry you; more's the pity, I ſay: t'other had a fine face, fair hair, a good leg, danc'd well, ſung well, in ſhort, was born for love.

LISE.

What are you talking of?

MARTHA.

Even in the mid'ſt of all his freaks and follies, all his ſtrange conduct, one might ſee a fund of honour in his *thear*.

LISE

LISE.

There was; he ſeem'd form'd for virtue.

MARTHA.

Don't think, madam, I mean to flatter him: but to do him juſtice, he was not mean, nor ſervile; no railer, no ſharper, no liar.

LISE.

No: but———

MARTHA.

Away: here comes his brother.

LISE.

Nay: we muſt ſtay now, it is too late to get off.

SCENE IV.

LISL, MARTHA, FIERENFAT the Preſident.

FIERENFAT.

To be ſure, madam, this augmentation of fortune muſt make the match more agreeable: increaſe of riches is increaſe of happineſs, and, as I may ſay, the very ſoul of houſe-keeping: fortune, honour, and dignity, will not be wanting to the wife of Monſ. Fierenfat. At Cognac, madam, you will have the precedency of the firſt ladies of the Beau-monde: let me tell you, madam, no little ſatisfaction: you will hear them whiſpring as you go along, there ſhe goes, madame la Preſidente: really,

madam,

madam, when I reflect upon my rank, my riches, the privileges of my high office, and all the good qualities I poſſeſs, altogether with my right of elderſhip, which will be made over to me, I aſſure you, madam, I pay you no ſmall compliment.

MARTHA.

Now, for my part, I am of another opinion: always to be talking of your quality, your rank, and your riches, is extremely ridiculous: a Midas and Narciſſus at once, blown up with pride, and contracted with avarice; always looking at yourſelf and your money; a Petit-maitre with a band on; the moſt unnatural of all human creatures: a young coxcomb may paſs off, but a young miſer is—a monſter.

FIERENFAT.

I believe, ſweet-heart, it is not you whom I am to marry to day, but this lady; therefore, you will please, madam, to trouble your head no more about us: ſilence will become you beſt.

[Turning to Lucy.

You madam, I hope, who in an hour or two are to be my wife, will, I hope, favour me ſo far as, before night, to diſmiſs this bluſtering body-guard of yours, who makes uſe of a chamber-maid's privilege to give a

kocke

looſe to her impertinence: but I wou'd have her know I am not a Preſident for nothing, and may, perhaps, lock her up for her own good.

MARTHA. [To Liſe.

Speak to him, madam, and defend me: if he locks me up, he may lock you up too, for aught I know.

LISE. [Aſide.

I wiſh he does not indeed.

MARTHA.

Speak to him then, and don't mutter.

LISE.

What can I ſay to him?

MARTHA.

Abuſe him.

LISE.

No: I'll reaſon with him.

MARTHA.

That will never do, take my word for it; t'other's the better way.

SCENE VI.

RONDON to LISE, &c.

RONDON.

Upon my word, a pleaſant affair this.

FIERENFAT.

What's the matter?

RONDON.

RONDON.

You ſhall hear. As I was tramping to your old gentleman with the parchments, I met him at the foot of this rock, talking with a traveller who had juſt lit out of a coach.

LISE.

A young traveller?

RONDON.

No: a toothleſs old fellow leaning on a crutch. I obſerv'd them rubbing their grey beards againſt each other for ſome time, ſhrugging up they humpbacks, and ſighing moſt piteouſly; then they turn'd up the whites of their eyes, and fell o'ſniveling together: at laſt Euphemon, with a crabbed face, told me, he had met with a great calamity, that at leaſt he muſt have time to weep before he cou'd ſign the articles, and at that time cou'd not talk to any body.

FIERENFAT.

O! I muſt go myſelf and comfort him: you know I can manage him as I pleaſe; beſides, the affair is really my own concern; but as ſoon as he ſees me with the contract in my hand, he will ſign immediately. Time is precious, and my new right of elderſhip a matter of importance.

LISE.

There is no hurry, ſir, you need not be ſo impatient.

RONDON.

RONDON.

But I ſay he ſhall be in a hurry: all this is your doing, madam.

LISE.

How, ſir! mine!

RONDON.

Yes, your's, madam. All the croſſes and diſappointments that make families unhappy, come from undutiful daughters.

LISE.

What have I done, ſir, to diſoblige you?

RONDON.

What have you done! turn'd every thing topſy-turvy; put us all in confuſion: but I'll let theſe two wiſe-acres lay their heads together a little, and then marry you off in ſpite of their teeth; in ſpite of yourſelf too, if you provoke me.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

LISE, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

I SEE this matrimony frightens you a little: this noiſe and buſtle of preparation has ſomething terrible in it.

LISE.

To ſay the truth, ſo it has; and the more I think on the weight of this yoke, the more this heart of mine trembles at it. Marriage, in my opinion, is the greateſt good, or the greateſt evil; there is no ſuch thing as a medium in it: where hearts are united, where harmony of ſentiment, taſte and humour ſtrengthen the bonds of nature, where love forms the tie, and honour gives a ſanction to it, it is ſurely the happieſt ſtate which mortals can enjoy. What pleaſure muſt it be to own our paſſion publickly, to bear the name of the dear beloved object of our wiſhes! your houſe, your ſervants, your livery, every thing carrying with it ſome pleaſing remembrance of the man we love; and then to ſee our children, thoſe dear pledges of mutual affection, that form, as it were, another union: O! ſuch a marriage is a heaven upon earth: but to make a vile contract, to ſell our name, our fortune, and our liberty, and ſubmit them to the will of an arbitrary tyrant, and be only his firſt ſlave, an upper ſervant in his family; to be eternally jarring, or running away from one another, the day without joy, and the night without love; to be always afraid of doing what we ſhou'd not do; to give way to our own bad inclinations, or be continually oppoſing them; to be under

the

the neceſſity either of deceiving an imperious huſband, or dragging out life in a languid ſtate of troubleſome duty and obedience; to mutter, and fret, and pine away with grief and diſcontent; O ſuch a marriage is the hell of this world.

MARTHA.

The young ladies of this age have certainly, they ſay, ſome little dæmon, ſome familiar, to inſpire them! Why, what a deal of knowledge this girl has pick'd up in ſo ſhort a time! the moſt expert, artful widow in Paris, that ever comforted herſelf with the thought of having bury'd three huſbands, cou'd not have talk'd more learnedly on this head than my young miſtreſs here; but we muſt have a little Eclairciſſement with regard to this marriage, which it ſeems is ſo mighty diſguſtful: you don't approve of Monſ. le Preſident, pray how ſhou'd you like his brother? Come, unriddle the myſtery to me. Has not the elder brother ſupplanted the younger? Come, who do you love, or who do you hate? Tell me the truth at once, and ſpeak honeſtly.

LISE.

I know nothing about it: I cannot, dare not tell you the cauſe of my diſlike. Why wou'd you ſearch for a melancholy truth at the bottom of a heart already but too deeply afflicted? We can never ſee ourſelves

in the water, whilſt the tempeſt is howling round us: no; firſt let the ſtorm be huſh'd, the wind calm, and the ſurface ſmooth.

MARTHA.

Compariſons, madam, will never paſs for argument: it is eaſy enough ſometimes to ſee the bottom of a heart, it's clear enough: and if the paſſions are now and then a little tempeſtuous, a young lady of underſtanding can generally gueſs from what corner the wind blows that has rais'd the ſtorm. She knows well enough ——

LISE.

I tell you, I know nothing; and I am reſolv'd to ſhut my eyes, and ſee nothing. I wou'd not wiſh to know whether I am ſtill weak enough to retain a paſſion for a wretch whom I ought to abhor, nor wou'd I increaſe my diſguſt for one man by regretting the charms of another. No: let the falſe Euphemon live happy, and content, if he can be ſo; but let him not be diſinherited; never will I be ſo cruel and inhuman as to make myſelf his ſiſter on purpoſe to ruin and deſtroy him. Now you know my heart, ſearch into it no further, unleſs you mean to tear it in pieces.

SCENE

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, a SERVANT.

SERVANT.

Madam, the baroneſs of Croupillac waits below.

LISE.

Her viſit aſtoniſhes me.

SERVANT.

She is juſt arriv'd from Angouleme, and comes to pay her reſpects to you.

LISE.

Upon what occaſion?

MARTHA.

O upon your marriage, no doubt.

LISE.

The very ſubject I wou'd wiſh to avoid. Am I in a condition to liſten to a heap of ridiculous compliments, a regiſter of common-place cant, and hypocriſy, that tires one to death; where common ſenſe is murther'd by the perpetual exerciſe of talking, without ſaying any thing? What a taſk have I to go through!

SCENE III.

LISE, Mad. CROUPILLAC, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

Here her ladyſhip comes.

LISE.

Ay, I ſee her but too well.

MARTHA.

They ſay ſhe wants vaſtly to be marry'd, is apt to be a little quarrelſome, and almoſt in her dotage.

LISE.

Some chairs here. Madam, you will pardon me, if—

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O Madam!

LISE.

Madam!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I, madam, muſt likewiſe beg—

LISE.

Pray be ſeated.

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Sitting down.

Upon my word, madam, I am quite confounded, and wiſh, from the bottom of my ſoul, it was in my power to—

LISE.

Madam!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, madam, I heartily wiſh I cou'd ſteal your *charms; it* makes me weep to ſee you ſo handſome.

LISE.

LISE.

Pray, madam, be comforted.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

No, madam, that's impoſſible. I ſee, my dear, you may have as may huſbands as you pleaſe. I had one too, at leaſt I thought ſo; only one, and that's a melancholy conſideration; and trouble enough I had to get him too, and you are going to rob me of him. There is a time, madam; O dear! how ſoon that time comes about! when if a lover deſerts us, we loſe our all, and one is quite left alone: and let me tell you, madam, it is very cruel to take away all from one, that has little or nothing left.

LISE.

You muſt excuſe me, madam, but I am really aſtoniſh'd both at your viſit and your converſation: what accident pray has afflicted you ſo? whom have you loſt, or whom have I robb'd you of?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

My dear child, there are a great many wrinkled old fools, who fancy that, by the help of paint and a few falſe teeth, they can ſtop the courſe of time and pleaſure, and fix wandering love; but, to my ſorrow, I am a

little wiſer: I ſee too plainly that every thing is running away, and I can't bear it.

LISE.

I am ſorry for it, madam, if it be ſo; but I can't poſſibly make you young again.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I know it; but I have ſtill ſome hopes: perhaps to reſtore my falſe one to me, might, in ſome meaſure, give me freſh youth and beauty.

LISE.

What falſe one do you mean?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

My ungrateful, cruel huſband, whom I have run after ſo long; and little worthy he is of all my care. The preſident, madam.

LISE.

The preſident!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, madam: when Croupillac was in her bloom, ſhe wou'd not have talk'd to preſidents; their perſons, their manners, their every thing was my averſion: but as we grow old, we are not quite ſo difficult.

LISE.

LISE.

And ſo, madam——

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And ſo, madam, in ſhort, you have reduced me to a ſtate of miſery and deſpair.

LISE.

I, madam? how? by what means?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I'll tell you. I liv'd, you muſt know, at Angouleme, and, as a widow, had the free diſpoſal of my perſon: there, at that very time, was Fierenfat, a ſtudent, a preſident's 'prentice, you underſtand me: he ogled me for a long time, and took it into his head to be moſt villainouſly in love with me. Villainouſly, I ſay, moſt horrid and abominable; for what did he make love to? my money. I got ſome people to write to the old gentleman, who intereſted themſelves too far in the affair, and talk'd to him in my name: he returned in anſwer, that he would — conſider of it; ſo you ſee the thing was ſettled.

LISE.

O yes.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For my part, I had no objection: his elder brother was at that time, ſo I was inform'd, engaged to you.

LISE. [Aſide.

Cruel remembrance!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

He was a fooliſh fellow, my dear; but had then the honour to be in your good graces.

LISE. [Sighing.

Ha! ha!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

This ſilly fellow, my dear, as I was telling you, being quite out at elbows, kick'd out of doors by his father, and wandering about the wide world, dead, perhaps, by this time, (you ſeem concern'd) my college hero, my preſident, knowing extremely well, that your fortune was, upon the whole, much better than mine, has thought fit to laugh at my diſappointment, and go in queſt of your ſuperior — portion. But do you think, madam, to run in this manner from brother to brother, and engroſs a whole family to yourſelf? I do here moſt ſolemnly enter my proteſt againſt it: I forbid the banns: I'll venture my whole eſtate, my dowry, and every thing; in ſhort, the cauſe ſhall be

be ſo managed, that you, his father, my children, all of us ſhall be dead, before ever it is put an end to.

LISE.

I aſſure you, madam, with the utmoſt ſincerity, I am very ſorry that my marriage ſhould make you miſerable: I am ſure, however, you have no reaſon to be angry with me; but I find we may make others jealous without being happy ourſelves: look no longer, madam, I beſeech you, with an eye of envy on my condition; he is a huſband. I ſhall not quarrel with you for.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Not quarrel for him?

LISE.

No: I'll give him up to you with all my heart.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You have no taſte then for his perſon? you don't love him?

LISE.

I ſee very few charms in matrimony, and none at all in a law ſuit; and ſo, madam—

SCENE

SCENE IV.

M. de CROUPILLAC, LISE, RONDON.

RONDON.

So, ſo, daughter, here's fine work; proteſts, declarations, and law-ſuits, enough to makes one's hair ſtand an end. Ouns! ſhall Rondon be talk'd to thus? but I'll ferret them out, the impertinent raſcals.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Muſt I ſuffer more indignities! Hear me, Mr. Rondon.

RONDON.

What wou'd you have, madam?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Your ſon-in-law, ſir, is a falſe villain, a coxcomb of a new ſpecies, a gallant, and a miſer, a widow-hunter, a fellow that loves nothing but money.

RONDON.

He's in the right of it.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

In my own houſe has he a thouſand times vow'd eternal conſtancy to me.

RONDON.

RONDON.

Promiſes of that kind, madam, are very ſeldom kept.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And then to leave me ſo baſely.

RONDON.

I believe I ſhou'd have done the ſame.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

But I ſhall talk to his father in a proper manner.

RONDON.

I'd rather you wou'd talk to him than to me.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

'Tis a wicked thing, ſo it is; and the whole ſex will take my part, and cry out ſhame upon him.

RONDON.

They can't cry louder than yourſelf.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I'll make the world know how they ſhould treat a baroneſs.

RONDON.

I'll tell you how: laugh at her.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

A huſband, look ye, I muſt have; and I will take him, or his old father, or you.

RONDON.

Me?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, you.

RONDON.

I defy you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

We'll try it: I'll go to law with you.

RONDON.

Ridiculous.

SCENE V.

RONDON, FIERENFAT, LISB.

RONDON. [To Liſe.

Pray, madam, what's the reaſon you receive ſuch viſitors in my houſe? you are always bringing me into ſome ſcrape or other.

[To Fierenfat.

And you, ſir, you Mr. King of Pedants, what nonſenſical dæmon inſpir'd you with the thought of courting a baroneſs, only to laugh at and abuſe her? A pretty ſcheme indeed, with that flat face of your's, to give

give yourſelf the airs of a ſlighty young coxcomb; with that grave ſorrowful countenance to play the gallant: it might have became the rake your brother, but for you—fy! fy!

FIERENFAT.

My dear father-in-law, don't be miſled: I never was deſirous of this match; I only promis'd her conditionally, and always reſerved to myſelf the right of taking a richer wife, if I cou'd get one: the diſinheriting my elder brother, and coming into immediate poſſeſſion of his fortune, have given me pretenſions to your daughter: come, come, money makes the beſt matches.

RONDON.

So it does, my boy; there you're in the right.

LISE.

Now that right I take to be quite wrong.

RONDON.

Pſha! pſha! money does every thing, that's certain; let us therefore ſettle the affair immediately: ſixty good ſacks full of French crowns will ſet every thing right, in ſpite of all the Croupillacs in the univerſe. How this Euphemon makes me wait! I'm out of all patience; but let us ſign before he comes.

LISE.

LISE.

No, ſir, there I enter my caveat: I will only ſubmit on certain conditions.

RONDON.

Conditions! impertinence! you pretend to ſay—

LISE.

I ſay, ſir, what I think: can we ever taſte, can we enjoy that guilty happineſs, which ſprings from another's miſery? and you, Sir, [*to Fierenfat*] can you in your proſperity forget that you have a brother?

FIERENFAT.

A brother? I never ſaw him in my life: he was gone from home when I was at college, hard at my Cujatius and Bartole. I've heard indeed of his pranks ſince; and, if he ever comes back again, we know what we have to do, never fear that; we ſhall ſend him off to the gallies.

LISE.

A brotherly and a chriſtian reſolution! In the mean time you'll confiſcate his eſtate; that, I ſuppoſe, is your intention: but I tell you, ſir, I deteſt and abhor the project.

RONDON.

RONDON.

Heigh! heigh! very fine: but come, my dear, the contract is drawn, and the lawyer has taken care of all that.

FIERENFAT.

Our forefathers have determined concerning this matter; conſult the written law: let me ſee, in Cujatius, chapter the fifth, ſixth, and ſeventh, we read thus: 'Every debauch'd libertine that leaves his father's houſe, or pillages the ſame, ſhall, *ipſo facto*, 'be diſpoſſeſs'd of every thing, and diſinherited as a 'baſtard.'

LISE.

I know nothing about laws or precedents, nor have ever read Cujatius; but will venture to pronounce, that they are a ſet of vile unfeeling wretches, foes to common ſenſe and without humanity, who ſay a brother ſhou'd let a brother periſh: nature and honour have their rights to plead, that are more powerful than Cujatius and all your laws.

RONDON.

Come, come, let's have none of your codes, and your honour, and your nonſenſe; but do as I'd have you:

you: what's all this fuſs about an elder brother? there ſhou'd be money.

LISE.

There ſhou'd be virtue, ſir: let him be puniſh'd, but leave him at leaſt ſomething to ſubſiſt on, the poor remains of an elder brother's right: in a word, ſir, I muſt tell you, my hand ſhall never be purchaſed at the price of his ruin: blot out therefore that article in the contract which I abhor, and which wou'd be a diſgrace to us all: if lucrative views induced you to draw it up thus, it is a ſhame and a diſhonour to us, and therefore I deſire it may be expunged.

FIERENFAT.

How very little women know of buſineſs!

RONDON.

What! you want to correct two attornies at law, and make a contract void: O lud! O lud!

LISE.

Why not?

RONDON.

You'll never make a good houſewife; you'll let every thing go to rack and ruin.

LISE.

LISE.

At preſent, ſir, I cannot boaſt my knowledge of the world, or of oeconomy; but I will maintain it, the love of money deſtroys more families than it ſupports; and if ever I have a houſe of my own, the foundation of it ſhall be laid on—juſtice.

RONDON.

She is light-headed; but let us humour her a little: come, give him a little matter, and the buſineſs will be over.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, ay, well—I give to my brother—ay, I give him—come along.

RONDON.

Not a ſingle farthing.

SCENE VI.

EUPHEMON, RONDON, LISE, FIERENFAT.

RONDON.

O! here comes the old gentleman. Well, I have brought my daughter to reaſon; we want nothing now but your hand to the contract. Come, come, let's have no more delays, chear up, put on your jo-

vial

vial countenance, your wedding looks, man; for in nine months time, I'll lay my life, two thumping boys—come, come, let us laugh and ſing, and caſt away care: ſign, my boy, ſign.

EUPHEMON.

I can't, ſir.

FIERENFAT.

You can't!

RONDON.

Ay, here's another now!

FIERENFAT.

For what reaſon, pray?

RONDON.

What is all this madneſs? Are all the world turn'd fools? Every body ſays, no. Why how is this? what's the meaning of it?

EUPHEMON.

To ſign the contract at a time like this, wou'd be flying in the face of nature.

RONDON.

What! is my lady Croupillac at the bottom of all this?

EUPHEMON

EUPHEMON.

No: ſhe's a fool, and wants to break off the match for her own ſake: 'tis not from her ridiculous noiſe that my uneaſineſs ariſes, I aſſure you.

RONDON.

Whence comes it then? Did that fellow out of the coach put it into your head? Are we indebted to him for all this?

EUPHEMON.

What he told me muſt at leaſt retard our happy marriage, which we were ſo eager upon.

LISE.

What did he tell you, ſir?

FIERENFAT.

Ay, ſir, what news did he bring?

EUPHEMON.

News that ſhock'd me: at Bourdeaux this man ſaw my ſon, naked, friendleſs, and in priſon, dying with hunger; ſhame and ſickneſs leading him to the grave: ſickneſs and misfortunes had blaſted the flower of his youth; and an obſtinate fever, that had poiſoned his blood, ſeemed to threaten that his laſt hour was not far

far off: when he ſaw him, he was then juſt expiring: alas! perhaps by this time he is no more.

RONDON.

Then his penſion's pay'd.

LISE.

Dead?

RONDON.

Don't be frighten'd, child, what is it to you?

FIERENFAT.

Ha! the blood hath forſaken her cheeks; ſhe looks pale as death.

RONDON.

The jade has a little too much ſenſibility about her, that's the truth of it: but as he's dead, I forgive thee.

FIERENFAT.

But after all, ſir, do you mean—

EUPHEMON.

Don't be afraid; you ſhall have her; it is my deſire you ſhou'd: but to chuſe a day of mourning for a wedding-day, wou'd be highly unbecoming. How wou'd my griefs interrupt your mirth! how wou'd your chaplets fade when wetted with a father's tears! no, my ſon, you muſt put off your happineſs, and give

give me one day to indulge my ſorrow: joy ſo ill-timed as this wou'd be an affront to decency.

LISE.

No doubt it wou'd: for my part, I had much rather ſhare with you in your affliction, than think of marriage.

FIERENFAT.

Nay, but, my dear father—

RONDON.

Why, you're an old fool: what! put off a wedding, that has been the Lord knows how long upon the anvil, for an ungrateful young dog, who has been a hundred times diſinherited: a p—x on you and your whole family!

EUPHEMON.

At ſuch a time a father muſt ſtill be a father; his errors, his vices, and his crimes always made me unhappy; and it hurts me ſtill more to think, that he is dead without ever repenting of them.

RONDON.

Well, well, we'll make that matter eaſy: ha! boy, let us give him ſome grand-ſons to make him amends: come,

come, come, ſign, and let's have a dance: what nonſenſe this is!

EUPHEMON.

But, ſir—

RONDON.

But—Oons! this makes me mad: to be ſorry for the luckieſt accident that cou'd happen, ridiculous! Sorrow is good for nothing at the beſt; but to whimper and whine, becauſe you have got rid of a burthen, intolerable abſurdity! This eldeſt ſon, this ſcourge of your's, to my knowledge, two or three times had like to have broke your heart; ſooner or later he wou'd have brought you to the grave: therefore prithee, man, take my advice, and make yourſelf eaſy; the loſs of ſuch a ſon is the greateſt gain.

EUPHEMON.

True, my friend; but it is a gain that coſts me more than you think: alas! I lament that he died, and I lament that ever he was born.

RONDON. [To Fierenfat.

Away, follow the old gentleman, and be as expeditious as you can; the dead, you ſee, has got hold of the living; ſo take the contract, I'll not be haggled

gled with any longer; take his hand, and make him ſign. For you, madam, [*To Liſe*] we ſhall expect you to night; every thing will go well, I warrant you.

LISE.

I'm in the utmoſt deſpair.

END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

EUPHEMON the Son, JASMIN.

JASMIN.

I HAVE ſerv'd you, Sir, now two years, without knowing who or what you are: you were then my maſter; permit me now to call you my friend: you are now, like myſelf, thrown upon the wide world, and poverty has put us on a level: you are no longer the man of pleaſure, the gallant and gay Euphemon, treated and careſs'd by the men, ſurrounded and courted by the women. Every ſtiver you had is gone to the devil; and you have nothing now to do but to forget you was ever worth a ſhilling; for ſurely

the moſt inſupportable of all evils is the remembrance of happineſs which we no longer enjoy: for my part, I was always plain Jaſmin, and therefore the leſs to be pitied: born as I was to ſuffer, I ſuffer contentedly; to be in want of every thing is only natural to me; your old hat there, for inſtance, and coarſe ragged waiſtcoat, was my uſual garb; and you have great reaſon to be ſorry that you had not always been as poor as myſelf.

EUPHEMON.

How ſhame and ignominy attend upon misfortune! how melancholy a conſideration is it to reflect, that a ſervant ſhall have it in his power to humble me! and what's worſe, I feel that he's in the right too; he endeavours to comfort me, after his manner; he keeps me company; and his heart, rough and unpoliſh'd as it is, is ſenſible, tender, and humane: born my equal, (for as a fellow creature ſo he was) he tries to ſupport me under my affliction, and follows my unhappy fortune, whilſt every friend I had, abandons me.

JASMIN.

Friends, did you ſay, ſir? Pray, my good maſter, who are they? how are thoſe people made whom they call friends?

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

You have ſeen them, Jaſmin, coming into my houſe whenever they pleas'd, troubling me for ever with their importunate viſits; a crowd of paraſites, who liv'd upon my bounty, complimented my fine taſte, my elegance, my delicacy; borrow'd my money, then prais'd me before my face, and ſtunn'd me with their ridiculous flattery.

JASMIN.

Ay, poor devil! you did not hear them laughing at you as they went away, and making a joke of your fooliſh generoſity.

EUPHEMON.

I believe it; for in the beginning of my misfortunes, when I was arreſted at Bourdeaux, not one of thoſe, on whom I had laviſhed my all, ever came near me, or offer'd me his purſe; and when I got out ſick and friendleſs, I apply'd to one of them in this poor ragged condition, and almoſt famiſh'd, for a little charitable aſſiſtance to lengthen out my wretched life, he turn'd away his unrelenting eye, pretended even to know nothing of me, and turn'd me out like a common beggar.

JASMIN.

Not one to comfort or ſupport you?

EUPHEMON.

Not one.

JASMIN.

Such wretches! friends indeed!

EUPHEMON.

Men are made of iron.

JASMIN.

And women too.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! from them I expected more tenderneſs; but a thouſand times met even with greater inhumanity: one of them in particular I well remember, who openly avowed her paſſion for me, and ſeemed to take a pride in obliging me; and yet in the very lodgings, which ſhe had furniſhed at my expence, and with the money I had ſquandered upon her, did ſhe procure every day new gallants, and treat them with my wine, whilſt I was periſhing with hunger in the ſtreet: in ſhort, Jaſmin, if it had not been for the old man, who pick'd me up by chance at Bourdeaux, and who, he ſaid, knew me when I was a child, death had by

thi-

this time put an end to my misfortunes: but know'ſt thou, Jaſmin, whereabouts we are?

JASMIN.

Near Cognac, if I am not miſtaken; where, they tell me, my old maſter Rondon lives.

EUPHEMON.

Rondon! the father of—who did you ſay?

JASMIN,

Rondon, a blunt odd fellow: I had the honour of belonging to his kitchen once; but being always of a roving diſpoſition, choſe to travel; and after that was an errand boy, a lacquey, a clerk, a foot-ſoldier, and a deſerter; at length in Bourdeaux you took me into your ſervice. Rondon perhaps may recollect me: who knows but in our adverſity—

EUPHEMON.

How long is it ſince you left him?

JASMIN.

About fifteen years. He was a character; half pleaſant, and half ſurly; but at the bottom a good honeſt fellow: he had a child, I remember, an only daughter, a perfect jewel; blue eyes, ſhort noſe, freſh com-

plexion, vermilion lips; and then for ſenſe and underſtanding, quite a miracle. When I liv'd there, ſhe was, let me ſee, about ſix or ſeven years old, by my troth a ſweet flower, and by this time fit to be gather'd.

EUPHEMON.

O miſery!

JASMIN.

But why ſhou'd I talk to you about her? it can be of no ſervice to you; I ſee you are concern'd, and the tears trickle down your cheeks: my poor maſter!

EUPHEMON.

What unhappy fate cou'd guide me to this place! O, me!

JASMIN.

You ſeem in deep contemplation, and as if the ſight of this place made you unhappy: you weep too.

EUPHEMON.

I have reaſon.

JASMIN.

Do you know Rondon? Are you any way related to the family?

EUPHEMON.

O! let me alone, let me alone.

JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Embracing him.

For pity's ſake, my dear maſter, my friend, tell me who you are.

EUPHEMON. [In tears.

I am——I am a poor unhappy wretch, a fool, a madman, a guilty abandon'd criminal, whom heaven ſhou'd puniſh, and earth deteſt: wou'd I were dead!

JASMIN.

No: we muſt live. What, die with famine whilſt we can help ourſelves! we have our hands at leaſt, let us make uſe of them, and leave off complaining: look on thoſe fellows yonder, who have no fortune but their induſtry, with their ſpades in their hands, turning up the garden; let us join them: come, work, man, and get your livelihood.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! thoſe poor beings, mean as they are, and approaching nearer to animal than human nature, even they, taſte more pleaſure and ſatisfaction in their labours, than my falſe delicacy and idle follies cou'd ever afford me; they live, at leaſt, free from trouble, and remorſe, and enjoy health of body, and peace of mind.

SCENE. II.

M. de CROUPILLAC, Young EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

What do I ſee? or do my eyes deceive me? the more I look on him, the more I think it muſt be he. [*She looks ſteadfaſtly on him.*] And yet ſure it cannot be the ſame; it can never be that gallant Squire of Angoulême, that play'd ſo high, and ſeem'd to be lined with gold: it is he: [*She comes forward.*] but the other was rich and happy, handſome, and well-made; this fellow looks poor and ugly. Sickneſs will ſpoil the fineſt face, and poverty makes a ſtill more dreadful alteration.

JASMIN.

What female apparition is this that haunts us with her malignant aſpect?

EUPHEMON.

If I am not miſtaken, I know her well enough; ſhe has ſeen me in all my pomp and ſplendor: how dreadful it is to appear mean and deſtitute in the eyes of thoſe who have ſeen us in affluence and proſperity! let us be gone.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Coming up to Euphemon.

What ſtrange accident, my dear child, hath reduced thee to this pitiful plight?

EUPHEMON.

My own folly.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Why, what a figure doſt thou make!

EUPHEMON.

Ay, madam, the conſequence of having good friends; of being robb'd, and plunder'd.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Plunder'd? by whom? how? when? where?

JASMIN.

O, from mere goodneſs of heart: our thieves were mighty honeſt creatures, perſons that figur'd in the beau-monde, amiable triflers, gameſters, bottle-companions, agreeable ſtory-tellers, men of wit, and women of beauty.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I underſtand you: you have ſquander'd away all you had in eating and drinking: but you will think this nothing when you come to know the diſtreſſes I

have undergone, and the loſſes I have ſuffer'd with regard to——matrimony.

EUPHEMON.

Your humble ſervant, madam.

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Stopping him.

Your ſervant indeed! no, no, poſitively you ſhall ſtay, and hear my misfortunes; you ſhall be ſorry for me.

EUPHEMON.

Well, well, I am ſorry for you; good by to you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Nay, now I vow and ſwear you ſhall hear the whole ſtory. One Monſ. Fierenfat, a lawyer by profeſſion, got acquainted with me at Angoulême, about [*She runs after him.*] the time when you beat the four bailiffs, and run away: this Monſ. Fierenfat, you muſt know, lives not far from hence, with his father Euphemon.

EUPHEMON. [Coming back.

Euphemon!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes.

EUPHEMON.

For heaven's ſake, madam, that Euphemon mean you, ſo celebrated for his virtues, the honour of his race, cou'd he ——

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, ſir.

EUPHEMON.

And does he live here?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

He does.

EUPHEMON.

And may I aſk you, madam, how is he? how does he?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Very well, I believe, ſir: what the duce ails him?

EUPHEMON.

And pray, madam, what do they ſay ——

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Of whom, ſir?

EUPHEMON.

Of an eldeſt ſon he had formerly.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O, an ill-begotten rogue, a rake, a rattle-pate, an arrant ſot, a madman, a fellow given up to every vice; hang'd, I ſuppoſe, by this time.

EUPHEMON.

Indeed, madam —— but I am aſham'd of interrupting you in this manner.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

To proceed then: this Monſ. Fierenfat, as I was telling you, his younger brother, made ſtrong love to me, and was to have been marry'd to me.

EUPHEMON.

And is he ſo happy? have you got him?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

No: wou'd you think it, ſir, this fool, puff'd up with the thoughts of ſtepping in to all his mad brother's fortune, growing rich, and wanting to be more ſo, breaks off this match, which would have been ſo honourable to him, and now wants to lay hold of the daughter of one Rondon, a vulgar cit, the cock of the village here.

EUPHEMON.

Going to marry her, ſay you?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And here am I moſt dreadfully jealous of her.

EUPHEMON.

That beautiful creature.——Jaſmin here was juſt now giving me a picture of her: wou'd ſhe throw herſelf away ——

JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Aſide to Euphemon.

What are you about, ſir? this huſband is as good as another for her, I think: but my maſter's a ſtrange man, every thing afflicts him.

EUPHEMON. [Aſide.

This is beyond all bearing.

[Aloud to M. de Croupillac.

My heart, madam, is deeply ſenſible of the injury you have receiv'd; this Liſe ſhou'd never be his, if I cou'd prevent it.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You take it rightly, ſir; you lament my unhappy fate; the poor are always compaſſionate; you had not half the good-nature when you roll'd in money; but mind what I have to ſay, in this life we may always help one another.

JASMIN.

Help us then, dear madam, I beſeech you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You muſt act for me in this affair.

EUPHEMON.

I, madam! how is it poſſible for me to ſerve you?

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O, a thouſand ways! you ſhall take my cauſe in hand: another dreſs and a little finery will make you ſtill look tolerably handſome: you have a polite inſinuating addreſs, and know how to wheedle a young girl: introduce yourſelf into the family, play the flatterer with Fierenfat, compliment him on his riches, his wit, his dreſs, every thing about him, get into his good graces, and whilſt I enter my proteſt againſt the unlawful procedure, you will do all the reſt; by this means I ſhall at leaſt gain time.

EUPHEMON. [Seeing his father at a diſtance.

What do I ſee? O heaven!

[He runs off.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Ha! ha! the fellow's mad ſure.

JASMIN.

He's afraid of you, ma'am, that's all.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

A blockhead! here, you, ſtop, hark ye, hark ye. I muſt follow him.

SCENE

SCENE III.

Old EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

EUPHEMON.

Even the imperfect glance I had of that poor wretch, whoever he is, has, I know not why, fill'd my heart with anguish and disquietude: he had a noble air, and a turn of features that, some how or other, affected me: alas! I never see a poor creature of that age, but the sad image of my unhappy son recurs to me; I have still a father's tenderness for him: but he is dead, or only lives with infamy to disgrace me: both my children make me miserable: one by his vice and debauchery is my eternal punishment, whilst the other abuses my indulgence, and knows but too well that he is the only support of my old age: life is a burthen to me, and I must soon sink beneath it. Who art thou, friend?

[Perceiving Jasmin, who bows to him.

JASMIN.

Honour'd sir, noble and generous Euphemon, don't you remember poor Jasmin, sir, who liv'd with Rondon.

EUPHEMON.

Ah, Jasmin, is it you? time alters our faces, as you see by mine: when you liv'd here I had a good

fresh

freſh complexion, was hearty, and well; but age comes on, my time is almoſt over: and ſo, Jaſmin, you are come back to your own country at laſt?

JASMIN.

Yes, ſir: I grew weary of ſuch a fatiguing life of rambling about like a wand'ring Jew, ſo I e'en came home. Happineſs is a fugitive being, I am ſure it has been ſo to me. The Devil took me out, I believe, led me a long walk, and now has brought me back again.

EUPHEMON.

Well, I may aſſiſt you perhaps, if you behave yourſelf well: but who was that other poor wretch you were talking with, he that ran off juſt now?

JASMIN.

A comrade of mine; a poor wretch, half-ſtarv'd like myſelf, without a farthing; he's in ſearch of employment as well as I.

EUPHEMON.

Perhaps I may find ſome for you both: is he ſober, and ſenſible?

JASMIN.

He ought to be ſo: he has very good parts, I know; can write, and read, underſtands arithmetic, draws a little, knows muſic; he was very well brought up.

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

If ſo, I have a place ready for him: as for you, Jaſmin, my ſon ſhall hire you; he is going to be marry'd, to-night perhaps: as his fortune is increas'd, he'll want more ſervants; and one of his is going away too, and you may ſtep into his place: to-night I'll preſent you both; you ſhall ſee him at my neighbour Rondon's; I'll talk to him there about it; ſo fare thee well, Jaſmin; in the mean time, here's ſomething for you to drink.

SCENE IV.

JASMIN alone.

The good man! bleſſings on him! Cou'd I ever have thought in this vile age to have met with ſo good a heart? his air, his demeanor, his benevolent ſoul, form together a ſpeaking picture of the integrity of former ages.

SCENE V.

Young EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Embracing him.

Well, I have got a place for you; we are both to ſerve Euphemon.

EUPHEMON.

Ay! Euphemon!

JASMIN.

Yes, if you like it: you ſeem ſurpris'd: why are your eyes turn'd up in this manner, as if you were going to be exorcis'd? what is the meaning of thoſe deep ſighs, that will not let you ſpeak?

EUPHEMON.

O, Jaſmin, I can no longer contain myſelf; tenderneſs, pain, remorſe, all preſs upon me.

JASMIN.

What! has my lady there ſaid any thing to you? what has ſhe told you?

EUPHEMON.

She told me nothing.

JASMIN.

What's the matter then?

EUPHEMON.

My heart will no longer ſuffer me to conceal it from you: in ſhort, that Euphemon ——

JASMIN.

Well, what of him?

EUPHEMON.

O, he is——my father.

JASMIN.

JASMIN.

Your father? ſir?

EUPHEMON.

Yes, Jaſmin: I am that eldeſt ſon, that criminal, that unfortunate, who has ruin'd his unhappy family. O, how my heart flutter'd at the ſight of him, and offer'd up its humble prayers! O, with what joy cou'd I have fall'n down at his feet!

JASMIN.

Thou, Euphemon's ſon! forgive me, ſir, forgive my rude familiarity.

EUPHEMON.

O, Jaſmin, think'ſt thou a heart, oppreſs'd as mine is, can be offended?

JASMIN.

You are the ſon of a man whom all the world admires; a man of a million: to ſay the truth, the reputation of his ſon ſhews to no great advantage when placed near his father's.

EUPHEMON.

'Tis that which gives me moſt uneaſineſs. But tell me, what did my father ſay?

JASMIN.

JASMIN.

I told him, ſir, we were two unfortunate youths, very poor, but well educated, and wou'd be glad to ſerve him: he lamented our fate, and conſented to take us. This evening he will introduce you to his ſon, the preſident, who, it ſeems, is to marry Liſe; that fortunate brother, to whom my old maſter Rondon is to be father in-law.

EUPHEMON.

And now, Jaſmin, I will unfold my heart to you: hear the hiſtory of my misfortunes, and think how wretched I muſt be, to draw upon myſelf, by a variety of follies, the juſt indignation of a beloved parent; to be hated, deſpis'd, diſinherited; to feel all the horrors of beggary and want; to ſee my fortune given to my younger brother, and forc'd after all, in my ſtate of ignominy, to ſerve the very man who has robb'd me of every thing: this is my fate, a fate I have but too well deſerved. But wou'd you believe it, Jaſmin, in the midſt of all my calamities, dead as I am to pleaſures, and dead to every hope, hated by the world, deſpis'd by all, and expecting nothing, I yet dare to be——jealous.

JASMIN.

Jealous! of whom?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

Of my brother; of Life.

JASMIN.

So, you are in love with your ſiſter! well, that's a ſtroke worthy of you, the only ſin you had never yet committed.

EUPHEMON.

You are to know, Jaſmin, (for I believe you had then left Rondon) that we were no ſooner out of our infancy, than our parents promis'd us to each other: our hearts readily obey'd, and were united: the conformity of our ages, our taſte, our manners, our ſituation, every thing conſpir'd to ſtrengthen the tye; like two young trees, we grew up together, and were to have join'd our branches: time, that heighthen'd her charms, improv'd her tenderneſs, and love made her every day more lovely: the world at that bleſt time might have envied me; but I was young, fooliſh, and blind; link'd in with a ſet of wretches, who ſeduc'd my innocence; intoxicated with folly and extravagance, I made a merit of deſpiſing her paſſion for me, nay, even affronted her: O, I reflect on it with horror. The croud of vices, that ruſh'd in upon me, carry'd me away from my father and my friends: what was my fate after this I need not inform you.

Every

Every thing is gone; and heaven, which tore me from her, has left me nothing but a heart to puniſh me.

JASMIN.

If ſo it be, and you really love her ſtill, notwithſtanding all your diſtreſs, M. de Croupillac's advice was good, to inſinuate yourſelf, if poſſible, into Rondon's family. Your purſe is empty, and love perhaps may find means to fill it again.

EUPHEMON.

Cou'd I ever dare to look upon her, to come in her ſight, after what I have done, and in this miſerable condition? No. I muſt avoid a father and a miſtreſs; I have abuſed the goodneſs of them both, and know not (but it is too late to repent) which ſhou'd hate me moſt.

SCENE VI.

Young EUPHEMON, FIERENFAT, JASMIN.

JASMIN.

O, here comes our wiſe preſident.

EUPHEMON.

Is it he? I never ſaw his face before; my brother, and my rival!

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

Come, come, this does not go amiſs. I have preſs'd, and rated the old gentleman in ſuch a manner, that I believe we ſhall be able to finiſh the affair in ſpite of him. But where are theſe fellows who are to ſerve me?

JASMIN.

We are come, pleaſe your honour, to offer ourſelves ——

FIERENFAT.

Which of you two can read?

JASMIN.

He, ſir.

FIERENFAT.

And write too, I ſuppoſe?

JASMIN.

O yes, ſir, and cypher, and caſt accounts.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, but he muſt know how to talk too.

JASMIN.

He's a little modeſt, ſir, and but juſt recover'd from a fit of ſickneſs.

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

He looks bold enough, I think, and as if his own merit. Well, ſir, what wages expect?

EUPHEMON.

None, ſir.

JASMIN.

O, ſir, we have a moſt heroic ſoul.

FIERENFAT.

Well, upon thoſe conditions I take you ſervice: come, I'll preſent you to my wife.

EUPHEMON.

Your wife, ſir?

FIERENFAT.

Yes, I'm going to be marry'd.

EUPHEMON.

When, pray?

FIERENFAT.

To-night.

EUPHEMON.

O, heav'n! pray, ſir, forgive me, but deeply in love with her, ſir?

FIERENFAT.

Certainly.

EUPHEMON.

Indeed?

FIERENFAT.

Yes.

EU

EUPHEMON.

And are you belov'd?

FIERENFAT.

I hope ſo. A droll fellow, this! You ſeem extremely curious, Sir.

EUPHEMON. [Aſide.

How I wiſh to contradict him, and puniſh him for his exceſs of happineſs!

FIERENFAT. [To Jaſmin.

What does he ſay?

JASMIN.

He ſays, he wiſhes with all his heart he was like you, form'd to pleaſe.

FIERENFAT.

The ambition of the coxcomb! but come, follow me: be diligent, ſober, prudent, careful, clever, and reſpectful. What, ho! la Fleur, la Brie, you raſcals, where are you all? follow me.

[He goes out.

EUPHEMON.

Now cou'd I like to ſalute him with two good boxes on the ear, to make that lawyer's face of his twinge again.

JASMIN.

I find, my friend, you are not mended much.

EUPHEMON.

I'm ſure it is time to be ſo; and I aſſure you, I intend to be wiſer for the future: from all my errors I ſhall at leaſt reap this advantage, To know how to ſuffer.

End of the Third Act.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

M. de CROUPILLAC, Young EUPHERON, JASMIN.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I HAVE taken care, my friend, by way of precaution, to bring two ſerjeants from Angoulême; have you perform'd your part as well, and done as I deſir'd you? Shall you be able, think you, to put on an air of conſequence, and ſow a little diſſenſion in the family? Have you flatter'd the old gentleman? Have you look'd forward a little?

EUPHEMON.

No.

EUPHE-

M. de COUPILLAC.

How?

EUPHEMON.

Believe me, madam, I long to throw myſelf at her feet.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Pray then make haſte and do it; begin your attack as ſoon as poſſible, and reſtore my ungrateful ſeducer. I'll go to law for you, and you ſhall make love for me: chear up, man, put on your beſt looks; aſſure that air of importance and ſelf-ſufficiency, which is ſure to conquer every heart, which baffles wit, and triumphs over wiſdom: to be happy in love, you muſt be bold; reſume your wonted courage.

EUPHEMON.

O, I have loſt it all.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

How ſo, man? what's the matter?

EUPHEMON.

I had courage enough when I was not in love; but at preſent——

JASMIN.

There may be other reaſons why he ſhou'd be rather baſhful; this Fierenfat, you muſt know, is our

lord and maſter, and has taken us both into his ſervice.

M. D. CROUPILLAC.

So much the better; a lucky circumſtance: to be a domeſtic in your miſtreſs's family, let me tell you, is a ſingular happineſs: make your advantage of it.

JASMIN.

Yonder's ſomething pretty, and coming this way too, to take the air, I ſuppoſe: ſhe ſeems to come out of Rondon's houſe.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

'Tis ſhe: come, my dear lover, make haſte, now's your time: pluck up your courage, and ſpeak to her: what! ſighing and trembling, and pretend to love her too? O, fy, fy!

EUPHEMON.

O, if you knew the ſituation of my heart, you wou'd not wonder at my trembling and confuſion!

JASMIN. [Seeing Life at a diſtance.

Sweet creature! how beautiful ſhe looks!

EUPHEMON.

'Tis ſhe: O, heav'n! I die with love, with *remorſe*, with jealouſy, and deſpair.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Adieu: I will endeavour to return the obligation.

EUPHEMON.

All I aſk of you is, if poſſible, to put off this cruel marriage.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

That's what I ſhall immediately ſet about.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! I tremble.

JASMIN.

We muſt try to get her by herſelf; let us retire a little.

EUPHEMON.

I'll follow you: I ſcarce know what I have done, or what I am going to do. I ſhall never be able to face her.

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, JASMIN at the farther end of the ſtage, and EUPHEMON behind him.

LISE.

In vain do I go in and out, backwards, and forwards, endeavouring, if poſſible, to hide myſelf from myſelf; in vain do I ſeek for ſolitude, and examine my own heart: alas! the more I look into it, the more am I convinc'd that happineſs was never made

for me: If I do at any time enjoy a momentary comfort, it is from that old ridiculous creature Croupillac, and the thought of her preventing this deteſted match; but then all my apprehenſions return, when Fierenfat and my father urge it upon me with repeated importunities: they have gain'd over the good Euphemon.

MARTHA.

In troth, the old man is too good-natur'd, and Fierenfat governs him moſt tyrannically.

LISE.

I pardon him, he's fond of an only child; his eldeſt, poor man, gave him a great deal of uneaſineſs, and now he relies intirely upon the other.

MARTHA.

But after all, madam, notwithſtanding every thing that has been reported, it is not clear that the other is yet dead.

LISE.

Alas! if dead, I muſt lament; if living, I muſt hate him: cruel alternatives!

MARTHA.

The news of his danger, however, ſeem'd to have a powerful effect upon you.

LISE.

LISE.

One might be ſorry for his misfortunes without loving him, you know.

MARTHA.

But one may as well be dead as not be lov'd: and ſo you are really to be marry'd to his brother?

LISE.

My dear child, I am diſtracted at the thought of it: you have long known my indifference for Fierenfat; it is now chang'd to horror and deteſtation: marriage with him is a potion moſt dreadfully bitter, which, in my preſent deſperate caſe, I muſt ſwallow much againſt my will, I aſſure you; tho' my hand, at the ſame time, rejects it with horror and indignation.

JASMIN. [Pulling Martha by the Sleeve.

Hark'ee, fair lady, will you give me leave to whiſper a word or two in your ear?

MARTHA. [To Jaſmin.

Moſt willingly, Sir.

LISE. [Aſide.

O cruel fate! why did'ſt thou prolong a life, which an ungrateful guilty lover has made ſo truly miſerable?

MARTHA. [To Liſe.

One of the preſident's ſervants, madam, but juſt now hired to him: he ſays, he ſhou'd be glad to ſpeak to you.

LISE.

Let him wait.

MARTHA. [To Jaſmin.

Friend, my lady deſires you wou'd wait a little.

LISE.

Always teaſing me thus! even when he is abſent I can have no peace for him. O dear! how weary am I of this marriage already!

JASMIN. [To Martha.

My dear girl, procure us this favour, if you can.

MARTHA. [Coming back.

Madam, he ſays he muſt ſpeak with you.

LISE.

So! I ſee I muſt go.

MARTHA.

There is a perſon, it ſeems, who is very deſirous of ſeeing you; he muſt ſpeak to you, he ſays, or die.

LISE.

LISE.

I find I muſt go in and hide myſelf.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA, Young EUPHEMON, leaning on JASMIN.

EUPHEMON.

I can neither walk nor ſpeak; my ſight too fails me.

JASMIN.

Give me your hand; we'll croſs her as ſhe comes.

EUPHEMON.

O! I feel a deadly coldneſs at my heart [*to Liſe*] will you permit—

LISE. [Without looking at him.

What wou'd you, ſir?

EUPHEMON. [Throwing himſelf on his knees.

What wou'd I? that death which I deſerve.

LISE.

What do I ſee? O heav'n!

MARTHA.

Amazing! Euphemon! good God, how chang'd!

EUPHEMON.

Chang'd indeed: yes, Life, you are reveng'd of me. Well may you wonder, for I am chang'd in every thing: no longer do you behold in me that madman, that falſe wretch, ſo fear'd and deteſted here; he who betray'd the cauſe of nature and of love: young and thoughtleſs as I was, I fell a prey to every paſſion, and adopted every vice from my looſe companions: but O! the worſt of all my crimes, which never can be blotted out, never atoned for, was my offending you: but here I ſwear, by thee, and by that virtue, which, tho' I have forſaken, I yet adore, I have found my error. Vice, tho' I admitted it, was a ſtranger to this heart, which is now no longer ſtain'd with thoſe guilty blemiſhes that obſcur'd its native luſtre; that pure, that ſacred paſſion, which is ſtill reſerv'd for you, hath refin'd it; that tender paſſion, and that alone, brought me hither, not to break off your new engagements, or oppoſe your happineſs, that wou'd ill become a poor abandon'd wretch like me: but ſince the misfortunes, which I ſo well deſerv'd, have brought me, even in the prime of life, to the brink of the grave, I cou'd not help ſeeking you, to be a witneſs of my laſt moments; and happy, thrice happy ſhall I be, if he, who was once deſtin'd to be

your

your huſband, at length ſhall die, and not be hated by you.

LISE.

I am ſcarce myſelf: can it be Euphemon? can it be you? O heav'n! in what a condition too, and what a time is this: wretch as thou art, what cruel injuries haſt thou done to both of us!

EUPHEMON.

I know it: at ſight of thee, every folly I have been guilty of appears doubly inexcuſable: they were dreadful, and you know they were, that is ſome puniſhment, but not ſo much as I deſerve.

LISE.

And is it true, unhappy man, that thou haſt at laſt repented of thy follies; that your rebellious heart is at length ſubdued, and misfortune hath pointed out to you the road of virtue?

EUPHEMON.

Alas! what will it avail, that my eyes are open'd, when it is too late! In vain is that heart ſubdued, in vain is my return to virtue, ſince I have loſt in you its beſt, its only valuable reward.

LISE

LISE.

Yet, anſwer me, Euphemon; may I believe you have indeed gain'd this glorious victory? conſult your own breaſt, and do not again deceive me: can you yet be prudent and virtuous?

EUPHEMON.

I am ſo; for ſtill my heart adores you.

LISE.

And doſt thou ſtill love, Euphemon?

EUPHEMON.

Do I love? by that I live, that alone has ſupported me. I have born every thing, even infamy itſelf; and a thouſand times I wou'd have put an end to my wretched life, but that ſtill I lov'd it, becauſe it belong'd to you: yes, to you I owe my preſent ſentiments, my being, and that new life which now dawns upon me: to you I owe the return of my reaſon: with love like mine, wou'd to heav'n I may be able to preſerve it! O do not hide from me that charming face: look at me: ſee how chang'd I am: ſee the cruel effect of care and ſorrow: the roſes of youth are wither'd by remorſe and miſery: there was a time when Euphemon wou'd not thus have affrighted you: do but look on me, 'tis all I aſk.

LISE.

LISE.

If I ſee the thinking, the reform'd, the conſtant Euphemon, it is enough: in my eyes he is but too amiable.

EUPHEMON.

What ſays my Liſe? gracious heav'n! ſhe weeps.

LISE. [To Martha.

O ſupport me, my ſenſes fail. Can I ever be the wife of Euphemon's brother? But tell me,

[Turning to Euphemon.

Have you yet ſeen your father?

EUPHEMON.

O! I bluſh to appear before that good old man, whom I have ſo diſhonour'd: hated as I am, and baniſh'd from his preſence, I love and reverence, but dare not look upon him.

LISE.

What then is your deſign?

EUPHEMON.

If heav'n ſhou'd graciouſly prolong my days, if you muſt be my brother's happy lot, I propoſe to change my name and profeſſion, ſerve as a ſoldier, and ſeek for death in the field of honour; perhaps ſucceſs in arms may acquire me ſome glory, and even you may hereafter ſhed

a tear over the unhappy Euphemon. My honour at leaſt will never ſuffer by the employment; Roſe and Fabert ſet out as I ſhall do.

LISE.

'Tis a noble reſolution; and the heart that was capable of making it muſt be above guilt and meanneſs: ſentiments like theſe affect me much more even than the tears you ſhed at my feet. No, Euphemon, if I am left at liberty to diſpoſe of myſelf, and can poſſibly avoid the hateful match propos'd for me, if it is in my power to determine your fate, you ſhall not go ſo far to change your condition.

EUPHEMON.

O heav'n! and does thy generous heart melt at my misfortunes?

LISE.

They affected me moſt deeply; but your repentance hath ſecured me.

EUPHEMON.

And will thoſe dear eyes, that look'd on me ſo long with indignation, will they ſoften into love and tenderneſs? O thou haſt reviv'd a flame in the breaſt of Euphemon, which his follies had almoſt extinguiſh'd. Fond as my brother is of riches, tho' my father has giv'n him all that inheritance which nature had de-

ſign'd

ſign'd for me, he ſtill muſt envy my happineſs. I am dear to you; he alone, and not Euphemon, is diſinherited. O I ſhall die with joy.

MARTHA.

Deuce on him, here he comes.

LISE.

Be upon your guard, Euphemon; keep in thoſe ſtruggling ſighs, and diſſemble.

EUPHEMON.

Why ſhou'd I, if you love me?

LISE.

Conſider my relations, conſider your own father. Your brother ſaw us together, ſaw you at my feet; and all that we can now do is, not to let him know who you are.

MARTHA.

I can't help laughing, to think what a paſſion his gravity will be in.

SCENE IV.

LISE, YOUNG EUPHEMON, MARTHA, JASMIN, FIERENFAT at the further end of the ſtage, Euphemon turning his back to him.

FIERENFAT.

Either ſome devil has impair'd theſe eyes of mine; or, if I ſee clear, I moſt certainly beheld — O yes — it is ſo — it's all over with me.

Coming

[Coming forwards towards Euphemon.

O it is you, sir, is it? traitor, rascal, forger.

EUPHEMON. [Enrag'd.

I, I cou'd —

JASMIN. [Placing himself between them.

Sir, sir, this — this is an affair of importance that was going forward, and you interrupt it, sir; an affair of love, sir, tenderness, respect, gratitude, and virtue—for my part I'm distracted when I think of it.

FIERENFAT.

An affair of virtue! O yes, and [illegible] can call you that virtue? rascal, slave.

EUPHEMON.

O Jasmin, if Id ar'd —

FIERENFAT.

No: this is a gallant indeed with a witness: had he been a gentleman, but a servant, a beggar — If I was to sue him in a court of justice, 'twou'd be only so much money flung away.

LISE. [To Euphemon.

Be calm; if you have any regard for me, I beg you will.

FIERENFAT.

The traitor! I'll have you hang'd, you dog.

[To Martha.

You laugh, mistress,

MARTHA.

MARTHA.

I do, to be ſure, ſir.

FIERENFAT.

And why do you? what do you laugh at?

MARTHA.

Lord, ſir, 'tis ſuch a comical affair —

LISE.

You don't know, madam the danger you are in: you little think, my good friend, what the law inflicts on ſuch delinquents as you, and how often you may be —

MARTHA.

Pardon me, ſir, I know it mighty well.

FIERENFAT. [To Liſe.

You, madam, ſeem to be deaf to all this, faithleſs woman! with that air of innocence too, to play me ſuch a trick: your inconſtancy is a little premature on our very wedding day, and juſt before we are marry'd: 'tis a wonderful mark of your chaſtity.

LISE.

Don't be in a paſſion, ſir, nor lighty condemn innocence on bare appearances only.

FIERENFAT.

Innocence indeed!

LISE

FIERENFAT.

This is a pure impudent fellow: ſome lover, I ſuppoſe, in the diſguiſe of a ſervant. Who are you, ſir? anſwer me.

EUPHEMON.

I know not who I am, nor what will be my fate; my rank, condition, fortune, happineſs, my very being, all depends on her heart, her kind looks, and her propitious bounty.

FIERENFAT.

They may ſoon depend upon a court of juſtice, that I aſſure you. I'll go this inſtant, prepare my records, and haſten to ſign the inſtrument. Begone, ungrateful woman, and dread my reſentment; I'll bring your relations, and your father; then your innocence will appear in its proper light, and they will eſteem you accordingly.

SCENE V.

LISE, YOUNG EUPHEMON, MARTHA.

LISE.

For heavn's ſake, conceal yourſelf; let us go in immediately; I tremble at the conſequence of this. If your father ſhou'd find out it was you, nothing will appeaſe him: he will conclude that ſome new extravagance brought you back here on purpoſe to inſult

him, and to ſow diviſion between our families; and then you will be confin'd perhaps, even without being ſo much as heard in your own defence.

MARTHA.

Let me conceal him, and I'll warrant they ſhan't eaſily find him out.

LISE.

Come, come, you muſt away; I muſt endeavour to reconcile your father: the return of nature ſhall, if poſſible, be the work of love: you muſt be conceal'd a while — take you care [*To Martha.*] he does not appear: begone immediately.

SCENE VI.

RONDON, LISE.

RONDON.

Well, my Life, how is it? I was in ſearch of you and your huſband.

LISE. [Aſide.

Thank God! he is not ſo yet.

RONDON.

Where are you going?

LISE.

Decency, ſir, at preſent obliges me to avoid him.

[She goes out.

RONDON.

RONDON.

This preſident is a dangerous man, I find: now ſhou'd I like to be incog in ſome place cloſe to 'em, only to ſee how two lovers look when they are juſt going to be marry'd.

SCENE. VII.

FIERENFAT, RONDON, Conſtables, &c.

FIERENFAT.

Where are they, where are they? ha! gone; the ſubtle villains have eſcap'd me: where have the raſcals hid themſelves?

RONDON.

Your reverence ſeems out of breath? what are you in ſuch a hurry about? who are you hunting after? what have they done to you?

FIERENFAT.

Made a cuckold of me, that's all.

RONDON.

Ha! ha! a cuckold! ha! how! what is all this?

FIERENFAT.

Yes, yes, my wife: heav'n preſerve me from ever giving her that name! Yes, ſir, a cuckold I am, in ſpite of all the laws in the kingdom.

RONDON.

My ſon-in-law!

FIERENFAT.

FIERENFAT.

Yes, my father-in-law, 'tis but too true.

RONDON.

Well, but the affair —

FIERENFAT.

Is as clear as poſſible.

RONDON.

You try my patience too far.

FIERENFAT.

I'm ſure they have mine.

RONDON.

If I cou'd believe —

FIERENFAT.

You may believe it all, ſir, I aſſure you.

RONDON.

But the more I hear, the leſs I underſtand.

FIERENFAT.

And yet it's very eaſy to comprehend.

RONDON.

If I were once convinc'd of it, the world ſhou'd be a witneſs of my reſentment, I wou'd ſtrangle her with my own hands.

FIERENFAT.

FIERENFAT.

Strangle her then by all means, for the thing is fairly prov'd.

RONDON.

Something no doubt is wrong, by my finding her here in that condition; ſhe hung down her head, and cou'd ſcarce ſpeak to me; ſeem'd frighten'd, and embarras'd too. Come, my ſon, let us in, and ſurpriſe her. This is a caſe of honour, and where that is concern'd, Rondon liſtens no longer to reaſon. Away.

END of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

LISE, MARTHA.

LISE.

WHAT a deſperate ſituation is mine! ſcarce can I believe myſelf ſafe, even with you. Think what it muſt be for a ſoul ſo pure, ſo delicate, as mine, to ſuffer even for a moment ſuch injurious ſuſpicions: Euphemon, thou dear but fatal lover, thou wert born but to afflict me; thy abſence was worſe than death to me, and now thy return expoſes me to infamy: [*turning to Martha.*] for heav'ns ſake, take care of him, for they are making the ſtricteſt enquiry.

MARTHA.

MARTHA.

O never fear; I ſhall put 'em to their trumps, I warrant you: I defy all their ſearch-warrants: I have ſome certain little cunning holes in my cabinet which theſe ferrets can never get at; there, madam, your lover lies ſnug, ſafely conceal'd from the inquiſitive eyes of long-rob'd pedants. I have led the hounds a pretty good chace, and now the whole pack is at fault.

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, JASMIN.

LISE.

Well, Jaſmin, how ſtand our affairs?

JASMIN.

O I have paſs'd my examination moſt gloriouſly, gone through it like an old offender, grown grey in the profeſſion, and anſwer'd every queſtion without fear or trembling. One of them drawl'd out his words with all the ſolemnity of a pædagogue; another put on a haughty air, and wou'd have brow-beated me; a third, in a pretty ſilver tone, cry'd out, child, tell us the truth: whilſt I, with moſt laconic brevity, and unalterable firmneſs, fairly routed the whole group of pedants.

LISE.

They know nothing then.

JASMIN.

Nothing: to morrow perhaps they may know all: time, you know, brings every thing to light.

LISE.

I hope at leaſt Fierenfat will not have time to prejudice his father againſt me: I have a thouſand fears about it: I tremble for him, and for my own honour: in love alone I have plac'd my hopes, that will aſſiſt me —

MARTHA.

For my part, I'm in a ſad quondary about it, and wiſh ev'ry thing mayn't go wrong: conſider, madam, we have againſt us two old fathers, and a preſident, beſides ſcolds, and prudes innumerable: if you knew what haughty airs they give themſelves, what a ſupercilious ſneer, and ſevere tone, their proud virtue puts on upon this occaſion, with what inſolent acrimony they have perſecuted your innocence, believe me, madam, their clamours, with their affected zeal, and moſt religious fury, wou'd raiſe your laughter, perhaps even make you tremble.

JASMIN.

I have travell'd, madam, and ſeen noiſe, and buſtle enough, but never before was I witneſs to ſuch a hubbub: the whole houſe is turn'd topſy-turvy: they

are

are all knaves, fools, or madmen; whiſpering lies againſt you, and adding one untruth to another; telling the ſtory a hundred different ways: the poor fiddles are ſent back without receiving a farthing, or a drop of drink: ſix tables prepar'd for the wedding feaſt, full of the fineſt delicacies, overſet in the confuſion: the people run backwards and forwards; the footmen drink and laugh; Rondon ſwears, and Fierenfat is employ'd in writing the caſe out.

LISE.

And what does the worthy father of Euphemon do amid'ſt all this buſtle?

MARTHA.

O, madam, in his dejected aſpect we may read the ſorrows of afflicted virtue: he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and cannot bring himſelf to believe that you have ſtain'd the honour of your ſpotleſs youth with ſo black a crime: he defends you to your friends by the ſtrongeſt arguments: and when at length he is ſtagger'd by the proofs they bring againſt you, he ſighs, and ſays, if you are guilty, he will never again depend on any mortal breathing.

LISE.

The good old man, how his tenderneſs affects me!

MARTHA.

Here comes another, of a different kind, maſter Rondon; let us avoid him, madam.

LISE.

By no means; my heart is innocent, and ſhou'd be afraid of nothing.

JASMIN.

But I am, I aſſure you.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA, RONDON.

RONDON.

O thou giddy ward, thou unnatural girl! O Life, madam, I muſt know the bottom of this proceeding: how long have you been acquainted with this robber, this pirate? Tell me his name, his rank, his profeſſion; how got he into your heart? Whence comes he, and where is he? Anſwer me, madam, anſwer me. You contemn me, madam, and laugh at my reſentment: are not you aſham'd?

LISE.

No, ſir.

RONDON.

Always no, no, to me: am I never to hear any thing but no? It increaſes my ſuſpicion: when I am injur'd, I expect at leaſt to be treated with reſpect. I will be fear'd, madam, and obey'd too.

LISE.

LISE.

And ſo you ſhall, ſir. I will diſcover every thing to you.

RONDON.

Well, that's ſaying ſomething however: when I begin to threaten, people will mind me a little, and ———

LISE.

I have only one favour to beg of you — that, before I ſay any thing to you, Euphemon will be ſo obliging as to let me ſpeak a few words to him.

RONDON.

Euphemon! why, what has he to do with it? I think I am the propereſt perſon to be ſpoke to.

LISE.

My dear father, I have a ſecret to entruſt to him: let me beg you, for the ſake of your own honour, to ſend him to me: permit me — but I can tell you no more.

RONDON.

I muſt e'en yield to her requeſt; ſhe wants to explain herſelf to my good old friend, and I think I may ſafely truſt her alone with him; and then to a nunnery with the little huſſey immediately.

SCENE. IV.

LISE, MARTHA.

LISE.

O that I may be able to melt the good Euphemon! How my heart flutters and leaps within me! my life or death depends on this important moment. He comes. Heark'ee, Martha.

[Whiſpers her.

MARTHA.

I'll take care, madam.

SCENE V.

EUPHEMON, LISE.

LISE.

A chair here—pray, ſir, be ſeated. Oh! [ſighs.] permit me, ſir, on my knees——

EUPHEMON. [Riſing her up.

You mean to affront me, madam.

LISE.

Far from it, ſir; my heart eſteems and reveres you; I have ever look'd on you as a father.

EUPHEMON.

Are you my daughter?

LISE.

LISE.

Yes, ſir. I flatter myſelf I have not been unworthy of that name.

EUPHEMON.

After the unhappy affair, madam, that has broke off our connection, I muſt own ———

LISE.

Be you my judge, ſir, and look into my heart; that judge, I doubt not, will one day be my protector: but hear me, ſir, I will ſpeak my own ſentiments, perhaps they may be yours alſo.

[She takes a chair and ſits by him.

And now, ſir, tell me; if your heart had for a long time been bound by the pureſt and moſt tender regard to an object, whoſe early years gave the faireſt promiſe of all that is amiable, who every day advanc'd in beauty, merit, and accompliſhments; if, after all, his eaſy and deluded youth gave way to inclination, and ſacrified duty, friendſhip, every thing, to unbridled licentiouſneſs.

EUPHEMON.

Well, madam.

LISE.

If fatal experience ſhou'd teach him what falſe happineſs he had ſo long purſued, ſhou'd teach him that

the vain objects of his search sprang but from error, and wer w'd by remorse; if at length, asham'd of his crimes, his reason, instructed by misfortune, shou'd again light up his virtues, and give him a new heart; if, restor'd to his natural form, he shou'd become faithful, just, and honest, wou'd you, sir, cou'd you then shut up that heart which once was open to receive him?

EUPHEMON.

What am I to conclude from this picture, or what has it to do with our affair, and the injury I have receiv'd from your conduct? The wretch who was seen at your feet is a young man, utterly unknown to every body here: the widow says indeed she remembers him six months at Angoulême: another tells me he is a hardy profligate, with a head full of dark intrigues, and every kind of debauchery; a character which doubles my astonishment: I shudder with horror at it.

LISE.

O, sir, when I have told you all, you will be much more astonished; for heaven's sake, hear me then: I know you have a noble and a generous heart, that never was form'd for cruelty; let me then ask you, was not your son Euphemon once most dear to you?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

He was, I own to you, he was, and therefore it is that his ingratitude calls for a ſeverer vengeance: I have wept his misfortunes, and his death; but nature, in the midſt of all my anguiſh, left my reaſon but the more ſenſible of my injuries, and more reſolv'd to puniſh them.

LISE.

And cou'd you puniſh him for ever? cou'd you ſtill be ſo unhappy, ſo miſerable, as to hate him? cou'd you throw from you a repenting child, an alter'd ſon, whoſe change wou'd bring back to you the image of yourſelf? cou'd you repulſe this ſon were he now in tears at your feet?

EUPHEMON.

Alas! you have forgot, you ſhou'd not thus open a wound that bleeds too freſh, and inflict new torments on me: my ſon is dead, or far from hence remains ſtill harden'd in his follies. O if he had return'd to virtue, wou'd he not come, and aſk forgiveneſs of me?

LISE.

Yes, and he will come to aſk it; you ſhall hear him; and hear him with compaſſion too, indeed you ſhall.

EUPHEMON.

What say you?

LISE.

Yes, sir: if death has not already put an end to his shame and grief, you may perhaps see him dying at your feet with excess of sorrow and repentance.

EUPHEMON.

You see too well how deeply I am affected: my son alive!

LISE.

If he yet lives, he lives to love and honour you.

EUPHEMON.

To love and honour me! impossible! how can I ever know it? from whom must must I learn that?

LISE.

From his own heart.

EUPHEMON.

But, do you think ——

LISE.

With regard to every thing I have said concerning him, you may depend on my veracity.

EUPHEMON.

Come, you have kept me in suspence too long; have pity on my declining years. Alas! I am full of

hopes,

hopes, and fears: I did indeed love my ſon, theſe tea
ſpeak for me: I lov'd him tenderly. O if he ye
lives! if he is return'd to virtue! explain, I beſeec
you, ſpeak to me, tell me all.

LISE.

I will: it is time now, and you ſhall be ſatisfy'd.

[She comes forward a little, and ſpeaks to youn
Euphemon behind the ſcene.

Come forth.

SCENE VI.

Old EUPHEMON, Young EUPHEMON, LISE.

EUPHEMON.

Good heaven! what do I ſee?

Young EUPHEMON. [Kneeling.

My father! O, ſir, know me, acknowledge m
decide my fate, for life or death depends upon a wor

Old EUPHEMON.

What cou'd bring you hither at this time?

Young EUPHEMON.

Repentance, love, and nature.

LISE. [Kneeling with young Euph

At your feet behold your children. Yes, ſi
have the ſame ſentiments, the ſame heart.

g EUPHEMON. [Pointing to Life.

nder kindneſs has pardon'd all my of-

acious ſir, follow the example which

love has ..., d forgive your unhappy ſon; driv'n as I was to deſpair, all I hoped for was to die belov'd by her a... and if I live, I will live to deſerve it. You ... from me: what is it, ſir, that tranſports you ...? ... is mov'd: is it with hatred ... your wre... co...demn'd———

Old EUPHEMON. [Raiſing up his ſon, and embracing him.

'Tis love; 'tis tenderneſs: I forgive thee: if thou art reſtor'd to virtue, I am ſtill thy father.

LISE.

And I thy wife. O, ſir, long ſince our hearts were united; permit us at your feet to renew our vows: it is not your riches he aſks of you, he brings you now a heart too pure for ſuch a wiſh; he wants nothing: if he is virtuous, I have enough for both, and he ſhall have it all.

SCENE

SCENE VII.

To them RONDON, M. de CROUPILLAC, FIERENFAT, Bailiff's Follower, Attendants.

FIERENFAT.

Yonder he is, talking to her ſtill; let us ſhew ourſelves men of courage, and take him by ſurpriſe.

RONDON.

Ay, let us be bold, we are ſix to one.

LISE. [To Rondon.

Now, ſir, open your eyes, and ſee who it is I love.

RONDON.

'Tis he.

FIERENFAT.

Who?

LISE.

Your brother.

Old EUPHEMON.

The ſame, ſir.

FIERENFAT.

You are pleaſed to jeſt, ſir: this ſcoundrel my brother?

LISE.

Yes, ſir.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Upon my honour! I am very glad to hear it.

RONDON.

RONDON.

What wonderful metamorphoſis; why this is my droll valet.

FIERENFAT.

So, ſo, I play a pretty extraordinary part here: why, what brother is this? ha!

Old EUPHEMON.

He is your brother, ſir; I had loſt him; but heaven and repentance has reſtor'd him to me.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And luckily enough for me.

FIERENFAT.

The raſcal is come back only to take away my wife from me.

Young EUPHEMON. [To Fierenfat.

'Tis fit, ſir, that you know me; and let me tell you, ſir, 'twas you took her from me, not I from you. In better days I had her heart: the folly of raſh and unexperienc'd youth depriv'd me of a treaſure which I did not know the value of: but on this happy day I have found again my virtue, my miſtreſs, and my father: the rights of blood and the rights of love are at once reſtor'd to me, and perhaps you envy me the ſudden, the unexpected bleſſings. But take my inheritance; I give it you freely: you are fond of riches, and I of

her:

her: thus ſhall both be happy; you in my poſſeſſions, and I in my Liſe's heart.

Old EUPHEMON.

His diſintereſted goodneſs ſhall not be thus rewarded. No, Euphemon, thou ſhalt not be ſo unworthy of her.

RONDON.

Very good; very fine indeed!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For my part, I'm aſtoniſh'd, and yet not diſpleas'd: 'tis a comfort to me to think the gentleman is come on purpoſe to revenge, as it were, my charms.

[To Euphemon.

Quick, quick, ſir; marry her as ſoon as poſſible; heav'n is on your ſide, and to be ſure made that lady on purpoſe for you; you were born for each other; and, by this lucky accident, 'tis ten to one if I don't recover my preſident.

LISE. [To Rondon.

With all my heart. You, my dear father, will permit my faithful heart, which can be given but to one, to return to its right owner.

RONDON.

Why—if his brain is not quite ſo much turn'd, and———

LISE

LISE.

O, I'll answer for him.

RONDON.

If he loves you; if he is prudent———

LISE.

O doubt it not.

RONDON.

And if Euphemon will give him a good fortune, why—I agree.

PIERRENFAT.

To be sure I am a great gainer in this affair, by finding a new brother; but then I lose my wedding expences, my fortune, and a wife into the bargain.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For shame, thou sordid wretch, for ever in pursuit of riches! have not I, in notes, bonds, and houses, enough to live upon, and more, much more, than you deserve? Am I not your first love? Did'st thou not swear fidelity to me? Have not I it all under your own hand? your madrigals without sense, your songs without wit, your promises without meaning? But we'll try it at law, sir: I'll produce them in a court of justice; and the parliament, in such a case, I am sure, ought to make an act on purpose to punish ingratitude.

RONDON.

RONDON.

My good friend, take care of yourſelf, and tremble at her reſentment: let me adviſe you to marry, if it be only to get ſhut of her.

Old EUPHEMON. [To M. de Croupillac.

I am ſurpris'd at the paſſion you expreſs for my ſon; methinks even the ſuit you threaten him with muſt ſooth his vanity; the cauſe of your anger does him too much honour: but permit me to addreſs myſelf to the dear object that has reſtor'd my ſon. Be united, my children, and embrace as brothers: and you, my friend, [*Turning to Rondon*] muſt return thanks to heav'n, whoſe goodneſs hath done all for the beſt. And henceforth,

Of youth miſguided, let us learn, whate'er
Their follies threaten, never to deſpair.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.

MEROPE.

A

TRAGEDY.

Repreſented in 1743.

A LETTER FROM THE Jeſuit TOURNEMINE to Father BRUMOY, ON The TRAGEDY of MEROPE.

Rev. FATHER,

THE *Merope* which you deſir'd to be returned laſt night, I have ſent you this morning at eight o'clock. I have taken time to read it with attention. Whatever ſucceſs the fluctuating taſte of *Paris* may think proper to beſtow on it, I am ſatisfy'd, that poſterity will applaud it as one of our beſt performances, and indeed as the model of true tragedy. *Ariſtotle*, the legiſlator of the ſtage, has allotted to *Merope* the firſt rank amongſt the fine ſubjects for tragedy. It is treated by *Euripides*, we know, and in ſuch a manner, as we learn from *Ariſtotle*, that whenever his *Creſphontes* was exhibited at *Athens*, that ingenious

people,

people, who were accuſtomed to the fineſt dramatic performances, were ſtruck, ravith'd and tranſported in the moſt extraordinary manner. If the taſte of *Paris* ſhou'd not correſpond with that of *Athens*, we know which is to blame. The *Creſphontes* of *Euripides* is loſt; Mr. *Voltaire* has reſtored it to us. You, my dear ſir, who have given us an *Euripides* in *French*, exactly as he appeared to admiring *Greece*, have acknowledged in the *Merope* of our illuſtrious friend, the natural, the ſimple, and the pathetic of *Euripides*. Mr. *Voltaire* has preſerved the ſimplicity of the ſubject, has not only diſencumber'd it from ſuperfluous epiſodes, but from many unneceſſary ſcenes alſo: the danger of *Ægiſthus* alone fills the ſtage: the intereſt increaſes from ſcene to ſcene, till we come to the cataſtrophe, the ſurpriſe of which is managed and prepared with the greateſt art. We expect it indeed from the grand-ſon of *Alcides*. Every thing paſſes upon the ſtage as it did in *Mycenæ*. The theatrical ſtrokes are not forced and unnatural; or ſuch as, by their great degree of the marvellous, ſhock all probability: they ariſe entirely from the ſubject: it is the hiſtorical event repreſented to us in the moſt lively manner. It is impoſſible not to be deeply mov'd and affected by that ſcene where *Narbas* arrives, at the very inſtant when

when *Merope* is going to ſacrifice her ſon, on a ſuppoſition that ſhe is about to revenge him: or by that ſcene, where ſhe has no other means of ſaving him from inevitable death, than by diſcovering him to the tyrant. The fifth act equals, if not ſurpaſſes, any of thoſe few excellent laſt acts, which our ſtage has to boaſt of. Every thing paſſes without; notwithſtanding which the author has ſo artfully and judiciouſly contrived, as to bring all the action before us: the narration by *Iſmenia* is not one of thoſe ſtudied artificial pieces which are foreign to the ſubject; where the poet's wit is made to ſhine out of its place, ſuch as throw an air of coldneſs and inſipidity over the whole fable. This is nothing but action throughout. The trouble and agitation viſible in *Iſmenia*, are expreſſive of the tumult ſhe deſcribes *. I ſay nothing of the verſification, which is

* The *French* Sentence is as follows: 'Je ne parle point de 'la *verſification*; le poete, admirable *verſificateur*, s'eſt ſurpaſſé; 'jamais ſa *verſification* ne fut plus belle & plus claire:' which, literally tranſlated, wou'd run thus: 'I ſay nothing of the *verſifi*-'*cation*; the poet, an admirable *verſifyer*, has ſurpaſſed him-'ſelf; never was his *verſification* ſo beautiful and ſo clear.' Here we ſee the words verſifyer and verſification repeated no leſs than three times in three lines. An Engliſh Ear is too delicate to admit of this. I have been frequently obliged to vary the turn and expreſſion of the ſentence, to avoid this repetition of the ſame word, which *Voltaire* himſelf is often guilty of, though, in general, a correct writer.

is more clear and beautiful, than any I remember to have ſeen, even in *Voltaire*, who is certainly an excellent poet: all thoſe, in ſhort, who feel an honeſt indignation at the corruption and depravity of our preſent taſte; all who have at heart the reformation of our ſtage; who wiſh, that, by a careful imitation of the *Greeks*, whom in many perfections of the drama we have ſurpaſſed, we might endeavour to obtain the true end and deſign of it, by making the theatre, what it might be made, the ſchool of virtue: all thoſe, who think thus rationally and ſeriouſly, muſt be pleaſed to ſee ſo great and celebrated a poet as *Voltaire* employing his fine talents in ſuch a tragedy as this, without love in it.

He has not imprudently hazarded the ſucceſs of ſo noble a deſign; but in the place of love has ſubſtituted ſentiments of virtue, which are not leſs forcible. As much prejudiced as we are in favour of tragedies founded on love intrigues, it is nevertheleſs true, (and we have often obſerved it) that thoſe tragedies, which have met with the greateſt ſucceſs, were not indebted to their love ſcenes for it: on the other hand, all our good critics allow, that romantic gallantry has diſgraced and degraded our ſtage, and ſome of our beſt writers alſo. The great *Corneille* was ſenſible of this; he

he ſubmitted, not without reluctancy, to the reigning taſte of the age; not venturing to baniſh love entirely, he went at leaſt ſo far as to baniſh ſucceſsful love: he wou'd not permit it to appear weak or mean, but rais'd it even to heroiſm, chooſing rather to go beyond nature, than to ſink it into a too tender and contagious paſſion.

Thus, Rev. father, have I ſent you that judgment which your illuſtrious friend ſeem'd deſirous of: I wrote it in haſte, which is a proof of my regard; but the paternal friendſhip which I have had for him, even from his infancy, hath not ſo far prevail'd as to blind me in his favour. You will let him ſee what I have wrote. I have the honour to be, my dear friend, my dear ſon, the glory of your father, as I ever muſt be, ſincerely your's,

Dec. 23, 1738. TOURNEMINE.

A LETTER

TO THE

MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI,

Author of the ITALIAN MEROPE, and many other celebrated Performances.

SIR,

THE *Greeks* and *Romans*, to whom modern *Italy*, as well as all other nations, is indebted for almoſt every thing, dedicated their works, without the ridiculous form of compliments, to their friends, who were maſters of the art: by this claim I take the liberty of addreſſing to you the *French Merope*.

The *Italians*, who have been the reſtorers of almoſt all the fine arts, and the inventors of many, were the firſt, who, under the auſpices of *Leo* the Tenth, revived tragedy; and you, ſir, are the firſt who, in this age, when the *Sophoclean* art became enervated by love-intrigues, often foreign to the ſubject, and as often debaſed by idle buffooneries, that reſtected

reflected diſhonour on the taſte of your ingenious countrymen, you, ſir, were the firſt who had courage and genius enough to hazard a tragedy without gallantry, a tragedy worthy of *Athens* in its glory; wherein the maternal affection conſtitutes the whole intrigue, and the moſt tender intereſt ariſes from the pureſt virtue. *France* prides itſelf in her *Athaliah*: it is indeed the maſter-piece of our ſtage, perhaps of poetry itſelf: of all the pieces that are exhibited amongſt us, it is the only one where love is not introduced: but at the ſame time we muſt allow, that it is ſupported by the pomp of religion, and that majeſty of eloquence which appears in the prophets. You had not that reſource, and yet you have ſo contrived, as to furniſh out five acts, which it is ſo extremely difficult to fill up without epiſodes. I muſt own, your ſubject appeared to me much more intereſting and tragical than that of *Athaliah*; and even if our admirable *Racine* had worked up his maſter-piece with more art, more poetry, and more ſublimity than he has, your's, I am ſatisfied, would have drawn more tears from the audience.

The preceptor of *Alexander*, (kings ought always to have ſuch preceptors) the great *Ariſtotle*, that extenſive genius, ſo juſt, and ſo deeply verſed in all the learning of thoſe times, *Ariſtotle*, in his art of

poetry, has declared, that the meeting of *Merope* and her ſon was the moſt intereſting circumſtance of the whole *Grecian* theatre. This ſtroke was, in his opinion, infinitely ſuperior to all the reſt. *Plutarch* tells us, that the *Greeks*, who, of all the people in the world, had the quickeſt feeling, trembled with fear, leaſt the old man, who was to ſtop the arm of *Merope*, ſhould not come time enough. That piece, which was played in his time, and a few fragments of which are ſtill extant, appeared to him the moſt affecting of all the tragedies of *Euripides*; but it was not the choice of his ſubject alone to which that poet owed his ſucceſs, though in every ſpecies of the drama, a happy choice is, no doubt, of the greateſt ſervice.

France has ſeen ſeveral *Meropes*, but none of them ever ſucceeded: the authors perhaps overloaded the ſimple ſubject with foreign ornaments: it was the naked *Venus* of *Praxiteles* which they wanted to cover with tinſel. It requires a great deal of time to teach men, that every thing which is great ſhould be ſimple and natural. In 1641, when the *French* ſtage began to flouriſh, and even to raiſe itſelf above that of *Greece*, by the genius of *P. Corneille*, Cardinal *Richelieu*, who ambitiouſly ſought for glory of every kind, and who had juſt then built a magnificent hall,

to

for theatrical repreſentations, in the Palais Royal, of which he had himſelf furniſhed the deſign, had a *Merope* played there under the name of *Telephonte*; the plot of it is generally believed to have been intirely his own. There are about a hundred verſes in it, ſuppoſed to be written by him; the reſt was by *Colletet*, *Bois-Roberts*, *Démarets*, and *Chapelain*; but all the power of Cardinal *Richelieu* could not impart to thoſe writers that genius which they never poſſeſſed: his own was not indeed adapted to the ſtage, though he had a good taſte; ſo that all he could do, or that could be expected from him, was to patroniſe and encourage the great *Corneille*.

Mr. *Gilbert*, reſident of the celebrated Queen *Chriſtina*, in 1643, gave us his *Merope*, which is at preſent as little known as the other. La *Chapelle*, of the *French* academy, author of a tragedy called *Cleopatra*, which was played with ſome ſucceſs, gave us another *Merope* in 1683, and took care to inſert a love epiſode: he complains withal in his preface, that the critics reproach'd him with too great a degree of the marvellous; but he was miſtaken, it was not the marvellous that ſunk his performance, but in reality the want of genius, added to the coldneſs and inſipidity of his verſification: this is the great point, the

capital fault, that condemns ſo many poems to oblivion,

The art of eloquence in verſe is of all arts the moſt difficult and the moſt uncommon: there are a thouſand geniuſſes to be found, who can plan a work, and put it into verſe after the common manner; but to treat it like a true poet, is a talent which is ſeldom beſtowed on above two or three men on the face of the whole earth.

In *December*, 1701, M. *de la Grange* played his *Amaſis*, which is nothing more than the ſubject of *Merope* under another name. Gallantry has its ſhare in this performance likewiſe; and there is more of the marvellous in it, even than in *la Chapelle*'s: but it is more intereſting, conducted with more art and genius, and written with more warmth and power; notwithſtanding which, it met with no great ſucceſs;

Et habent ſua fata libelli.

Since that, however, it has been revived with great applauſe; and is one of thoſe few pieces which generally gives pleaſure in the repreſentation.

Before and after *Amaſis* we have had ſeveral tragedies, on ſubjects very nearly reſembling this, wherein a mother is going to revenge the death of her ſon on the ſon himſelf, and diſcovers him juſt at the

inſtant when ſhe was about to kill him. We frequently ſaw on our ſtage that ſtriking but rarely probable ſituation, wherein a perſon comes with a poignard in his hand ready to deſtroy his enemy, and another arrives at the ſame inſtant, and ſnatches it from him. This incident recommended, at leaſt for a time, the *Camma* of *Thomas Corneille*.

But amongſt all the tragedies on this ſubject, which I have here enumerated, there is not one of them but what is filled with ſome epiſode of love, or rather gallantry; for every thing muſt give way to the reigning taſte. But you muſt not believe, ſir, that this unhappy cuſtom of loading our tragedies with ridiculous love intrigues was owing to *Racine*; a crime, which, in *Italy*, I know he is generally reproach'd with: on the contrary, he did every thing in his power to reform the public taſte in this particular: the paſſion of love is never brought in by him as a mere epiſode; it is the foundation or ground-plot of all his pieces, and forms the principal intereſt: it is certainly of all the paſſions the moſt truly theatrical, the moſt fruitful in ſentiments, and admits of the greateſt variety: it ought, therefore, no doubt, to be the ſoul of a dramatic performance, or entirely to be baniſhed from it: if love is not tragical, it is inſipid; and

when it is tragical, it ſhou'd reign alone; it was never made for a ſecond place. It was *Rotrou*, or rather we muſt own the great *Corneille* himſelf, who, in his creation of the ſtage, at the ſame time diſfigur'd and diſgrac'd it, by thoſe ridiculous intrigues, beſpoken, as it were, and made on purpoſe, thoſe affairs of gallantry, which not being true paſſions, were unworthy of the ſtage: if you wou'd know *the reaſon* why Corneille's tragedies are ſo ſeldom play'd, the reaſon is plain enough: it is becauſe, in his *Otho*,

'*Otho* makes a compliment to his miſtreſs more 'like a man of wit than a real lover: he follows ſtep 'by ſtep the effort of his memory, which it is much 'more eaſy to admire than to believe. *Camilla* her-'ſelf ſeem'd to be of this opinion; ſhe wou'd have 'liked much better a diſcourſe leſs ſtudy'd. — Tell 'me then, when *Otho* made love to *Camilla*, was he 'contented, or was ſhe kind?"

It is becauſe, in *Pompey*, *Cleopatra* (a uſeleſs character) ſays that *Cæſar*

'Sighs for her, and in a plaintive ſtile calls himſelf 'her captive, even in the field of victory.'

It is becauſe *Cæſar* aſks *Antony*, 'If he has ſeen this 'adorable queen:' to which Antony replies,* 'yes, 'my lord, I have ſeen her, ſhe is incomparable.'

It is becauſe, in *Sertorius*, old *Sertorius* falls in love, not only becauſe he likes the lady, but with a political view, and cries out,

'I love: but it ſuits my age ſo ill to be in love, 'that I even conceal it from the fair one who has 'charm'd me. As I know that the deep and yellow 'wrinkles on my forehead can have no great pow'r 'in captivating the ſenſes.

It is becauſe, in *Oedipus*, *Theſeus* begins by ſaying 'to *Dirce*, whatever dreadful havoc the plague may 'make here, abſence to true lovers is far more dread-'ful.'

In a word, it is becauſe ſuch love as this will never make us ſhed tears; and when that paſſion does not affect us, it muſt be quite inſipid.

I have ſaid no more here, ſir, than what all good judges, and men of taſte, ſay to one another every

* The French is,

Oui, Seigneur, je l'ai vûe, elle eſt incomparable.

Converſation of this kind, as *Voltaire* intimates, is much too low and familiar for the dignity of tragedy: but its being labour'd into verſe at the ſame time doubtleſs makes it ſtill more ridiculous. One wou'd ſcarce indeed have imagin'd, that the boaſted *Corneille* cou'd ever have written ſuch contemptible ſtuff as the lines here quoted.

day; what you have often heard at my houſe; in ſhort, what every body thinks, but none dare to publiſh: you know well enough the nature of mankind: half the world write in oppoſition to their own opinions, for fear of ſhocking receiv'd prejudices and vulgar errors. With regard to myſelf, who have never mix'd any political reſerve with my ſentiments on literature, I ſpeak the truth boldly, and will add, that I reſpect *Corneille* more, and have a higher opinion of the real merit of this great father of the ſtage, than thoſe who praiſe him indiſcriminately, and are blind to all his faults.

* A *Merope* was exhibited at *London* in 1731: who wou'd have thought a love-intrigue ſhou'd ever have been thought of at that time? But ever ſince the reign of *Charles* II. love has taken poſſeſſion of the Engliſh ſtage; though there is not a nation upon earth by whom that paſſion is ſo ill painted; but the intrigue ſo abſurdly brought in, and ſo badly treated,

---

* Notwithſtanding what Mr. *Voltaire* has here aſſerted, concerning an *Engliſh Merope*, acted at *London* in 1731, I cannot, by all the enquiry I have made amongſt perſons concern'd in the theatres at that time, diſcover that any ſuch tragedy was ever exhibited, and imagine it muſt therefore have been a miſtake of Mr. *Voltaire's*, whoſe veracity, in caſes of this nature, is not always to be depended on.

is the leaſt fault of the *Engliſh Merope*. The young *Ægiſthus*, deliver'd out of priſon by a maid of honour, who is in love with him, is brought before the queen, who preſents him with a bowl of poiſon, and a dagger, and ſpeaks thus to him: 'if you don't 'ſwallow the poiſon, this dagger ſhall put an end to 'your miſtreſs's life.' The young man drinks the poiſon, and is carry'd off in the agonies of death: he comes back in the fifth act coldly to inform *Merope* that he is her ſon, and that he has ſlain the tyrant. *Merope* aſks him how this miracle was perform'd: to which he replies, that a friend of the maid of honour had put poppy-water, inſtead of poiſon, into the cup. 'I was only aſleep (ſays he) when they thought me 'dead; I learn'd, when I awake, that I was your ſon, and immediately kill'd the tyrant.' Thus ends the tragedy; no doubt but it met with a bad reception: but is it not ſtrange that it ſhou'd ever have been repreſented? Is it not a proof that the *Engliſh* ſtage is not yet refin'd? It ſeems as if the ſame cauſe that deprives the Engliſh of any excellency in, or genius for muſic and painting, takes from them alſo all perfection in tragedy. This iſland, which has produc'd the fineſt philoſophers in the world, is not

equally

equally productive of the fine arts; and if the * *Engliſh* do not ſeriouſly apply themſelves to the ſtudy of thoſe precepts which were given them by their excellent country-men, *Addiſon* and *Pope*, they will never come near to other nations in point of taſte and literature.

But whilſt the ſubject of *Merope* has been thus diſgrac'd and diſfigur'd in one part of *Europe*, it has met with better fate in *Italy*, where it has for a long time been treated in the true taſte of the ancients. In this ſixteenth century, which will be famous throughout all ages, the count de *Torelli* gave us his *Merope* with choruſſes. If in *La Chapelle's* tragedy we find all the faults of the *French* ſtage, ſuch as uſeleſs intrigues epiſodes, and a romantic air; and in the *Engliſh* author the higheſt degree of indecency, barbariſm, and

* Poor *England!* depriv'd in one ſhort ſentence of all taſte and genius for muſic, painting, and dramatic poetry; an iſland of bears and barbarians: cou'd one have expected a cenſure ſo cruel and unjuſt from a writer of ſo much merit as *Voltaire?* A few leaves before he had told us, that there is not a nation upon earth wherein love is ſo ill painted as by the Engliſh writers. D. I *Mr. Voltaire* never hear of ſuch perſons as *Rowe*, *Otway*, or *Southern?* But ſuch is the force of prejudice, that nothing can prevail better of it; and yet this inconſiſtent cenſurer (for ſuch we muſt call him,) can boaſt in the very next page, that *his love to his own country has never hurt his eye againſt the merit of foreigners.*

——— Nemo fuit unquam
Tam dispar ſibi ———

abſurdity;

abſurdity; we likewiſe meet in the *Italian* with all the faults of the *Greek* theatre, ſuch as the want of action, and declamation. You, ſir, have avoided all the rocks which they ſplit upon; you, who have done honour to your country, by complete models of more than one kind, you have given us in your *Merope* an example of a tragedy that is at once both ſimple and intereſting.

The moment I read I was ſtruck with it; my love to my own country hath never ſhut my eyes againſt the merit of foreigners. On the other hand, the more regard I have for, the more I endeavour to enrich it, by the addition of treaſures that are not of its own growth. The deſire which I had of tranſlating your *Merope*, was increas'd by the honour of a perſonal acquaintance with you at *Paris*, in the year 1733. By loving the author, I became ſtill more enamour'd with his work; but when I ſat down to it, I found it was impoſſible to bring it on the *French* ſtage. We are grown exceſſively delicate: like the *Sybarites* of old, we are ſo immers'd in luxury, that we cannot bear that ruſtic ſimplicity, and that deſcription of a country life, which you have imitated from the *Greek* theatre. I am afraid our audiences wou'd not ſuffer young *Ægiſthus* to make a preſent of his ring to the man that ſtops him. I cou'd not have ventur'd to

ſeize upon a hero, and take him for a robber; though, at the ſame time, the circumſtances he is in authoriſe the miſtake. Our manners, which probably admit of many things which your's do not, wou'd not permit us to repreſent the tyrant, the murtherer of *Merope's* huſband and children, pretending, after fifteen years, to be in love with her; nor cou'd I even have dared to make the queen ſay to him, *why did not you talk to me of love before, when the bloom of youth was yet on my face?* Converſations of this kind are natural; but our pit, which at ſome times is ſo indulgent, and at others ſo nice and delicate, wou'd think them perhaps too familiar, and might even diſcover coquetry, where, in reality, there might be nothing but what was juſt and proper. Our ſtage wou'd by no means have ſuffer'd *Merope* to bind her ſon to a pillar, nor to run after him with a javelin, and an axe in her hand; nor have permitted the young man to run away from her twice, and beg his life of the tyrant: much leſs cou'd we have ſuffer'd the confidante of *Merope* to have perſuaded *Ægiſthus* to go to ſleep on the ſtage, merely to give the queen an opportunity of coming there to aſſaſſinate him: not but all this is natural: but you muſt pardon us for expecting that nature ſhou'd always be preſented to us with ſome ſtrokes of art;

ſtrokes

ſtrokes that are extremely different at *Paris* from thoſe which we meet with at *Verona*.

To give you a proper idea of the different taſte and judgment of polite and cultivated nations, with regard to the ſame arts, permit me here to quote a few paſſages from your own celebrated performance, which ſeem dictated by pure nature. The perſon who ſtops young *Creſphontes*, and takes the ring from him, ſays,

Or dunque in tuo paeſe i ſervi
Han di coteſte gemme? un bel paeſe
Sia queſto tuo; nel noſtro una tal gemma
Ad un dito real non ſconverebbe.

I will take the liberty to tranſlate this into blank verſe, in which your tragedy is written, as I have not time at preſent to work it into rhime,

Have ſlaves ſuch precious jewels where thou liv'ſt?
Sure 'tis a noble country; for, with us,
Such rings might well adorn a royal hand.

The tyrants's confident tells him, when ſpeaking of the queen, who refuſes, after twenty years, to marry the known murtherer of her family,

La Donna, come ſai, ricuſa e brama

Women, we know, refuſe when moſt they love.

The

The queen's waiting-woman anſwers the tyrant, who preſſes her to uſe her influence in his favour, thus:

—— diſſimulato in vano
Soffre di febre aſſalto; alquanti giorni
Donare è forza a rinfrancar ſuoi ſpiriti.

The queen, ſir, has a fever, 'tis in vain
To hide it, and her ſpirits are oppreſs'd;
She muſt have time to recollect them.

In your fourth act, old *Polidore* aſks one of *Merope's* courtiers who he is? To which he replies, I am *Euriſes*, the ſon of *Nicander*. *Polidore* then, ſpeaking of *Nicander*, talks in the ſtile of *Homer's Neſtor*.

——————— Egli era humano
Eliberal, quando appariva, tutti
Faccangli honor; io mi ricordo ancora
Diquanto ei feſteggiò con bella pompa
Le ſue nozze con *Silvia*, ch'era figlia
D' Olimpia e di *Glicon* fratel *d'Ipparcho*.
Ju dunque ſir quel fanciullin che in corte
Silvia condur ſolea quasi per pompa:
Parmi' l'altir hieri: O quanto ſiete preſti,
Quanto voi v'affrettate, O giovinetti,
A farvi adulti ed à gridar tacendo
Che noi diam loco!

The

The moſt humane, moſt gen'rous of mankind,
Where'er he went, reſpected and belov'd:
O I remember well the feaſt he gave
When to his *Sylvia* wedded, the fair daughter
Of *Glycon*, brother of the brave *Hipparchus*,
And chaſte *Olympia*: and art thou that infant
Whom *Sylvia* to the court ſo often brought
And fondled in her arms? alas! methinks
It was but yeſterday: how quickly youth
Shoots up, and tells us we muſt quit the ſcene!

In another place the ſame old man, being invited to the ceremony of the queen's marriage, ſays:

——————— Oh curioſo
Punto io non ſon, paſſò ſtagione. Aſſai
Veduti ho ſacrificii; ìo mi recordo
Di quello ancora quando il rè *Creſphonte*
Incomincio à regnar. Quella fù pompa.
Ora più non ſi fanno a queſti tempi
Di cotaï ſacrificii. Più di cento
Fur le beſte ſivenate i ſacerdoti
Riſplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgeſſi
Altro non ſi vedea che argento ed oro.

My time is paſt, and curioſity
Is now no more: already I have ſeen

Know

Enough of nuptial rites, enough of pomp
And ſacrifice: I ſtill remember well
The great ſolemnity, when king *Creſphontes*
Began his reign: O 'twas a noble ſight!
We cannot boaſt of ſuch in theſe our days:
A hundred beaſts were offer'd up, the prieſts
In all their ſplendor ſhone, and nought was ſeen
But gold and ſilver. ———

All theſe ſtrokes are natural, all agreeable to the characters and manners repreſented: ſuch familiar dialogues wou'd, no doubt, have been well receiv'd at *Athens*; but *Paris* and our pit expect a ſimplicity of another kind. We may, perhaps, even boaſt of a more refined taſte than *Athens* itſelf, where, though the principal city of all *Greece*, it does not appear to me that they ever repreſented any theatrical pieces except on the four ſolemn feſtivals; whereas at Paris there is always more than one every day in the year. At *Athens* the number of citizens was computed at only ten thouſand, and *Paris* has near eight hundred thouſand inhabitants; amongſt whom, I ſuppoſe, we may reckon thirty thouſand judges of dramatic performances, and who really do paſs their judgments almoſt every day of their lives.

In

In your tragedy you took the liberty to tranſlate that elegant and ſimple compariſon from Virgil.

> Qualis populeâ mærens Philomela ſub umbra
> Amiſſos queritur fætus, &c.

But if I were to take the ſame in mine, they wou'd ſay it was fitter for an epic poem: ſuch a rigid maſter have we to pleaſe in what we call the public:

> Neſcis, heu! neſcis noſtra faſtidia Romæ:
> Et pueri naſum Rhinocerontis habent.

The *Engliſh* have a cuſtom of finiſhing almoſt all their acts with a ſimilee; but we expect that, in a tragedy, the hero ſhou'd talk, and not the poet. Our audience is of opinion, that in an important criſis of affairs, in a council, in a violent paſſion, or a preſſing danger, princes and miniſters ſhou'd never make poetical compariſons.

How cou'd I ever venture to make the under characters talk together for a long time? With you, thoſe converſations ſerve to prepare intereſting ſcenes between the principal actors: they are like the avenues to a fine palace: but our ſpectators are for coming into it at once. We muſt therefore comply with the

national

national taſte, which is, perhaps, grown more difficult, from having been cloy'd, as it were, with ſuch a variety of fine performances: and yet amongſt theſe recitals, which our exceſſive ſeverity condems, how many beauties do I regret the loſs of! How does ſimple nature delight me, though beneath a form that appears ſtrange to us!

I have here, ſir, given you ſome of thoſe reaſons which prevailed on me not to follow what I ſo much admired. I was oblig'd, not without regret, to write a new *Merope*: I have done it in a different manner, but I am far from thinking that I have therefore done it better. I look upon myſelf, with regard to you, as a traveller to whom an eaſtern monarch had made a preſent of ſome very rich ſtuffs: the king wou'd certainly permit this traveller to wear them according to the faſhion of his own country.

My *Merope* was finiſh'd in the beginning of the year 1736, pretty nearly as it now ſtands; ſtudies of a nother kind prevented me from bringing it on the ſtage: but what weigh'd moſt with me was, the hazard which I ran in producing it, after ſeveral ſucceſsful pieces on almoſt the ſame ſubject, though under different names. At length, however, I ventur'd to produce it, and the public gave me a convincing

convincing proof, that they cou'd condeſcend to ſee the ſame matter work'd up in a different manner. That happen'd to our ſtage which we ſee every day in a gallery of pictures, where there are many of them on exactly the ſame ſubject. The judges are pleas'd by the obſervation of theſe different manners, and every one marks down and enjoys, according to his own taſte, the character of every painter. This is a kind of happy concurrence, which, at the ſame time that it contributes towards the perfection of the Art, gives the public a better inſight into it. If the *French Merope* has met with the ſame ſucceſs as the *Italian*, it is to you, ſir, I am indebted for it; to that ſimplicity in your performance which I have taken for my model, and which I was always an admirer of. Though I walk'd in a different path, you were always my guide. I cou'd have wiſh'd, after the examples of the *Italians* and *Engliſh*, to employ the happy facility of blank verſe, and have often call'd to mind this paſſage of *Rucellai*:

Tu ſai purche l' imagine della voce
Che riſponde da i ſaſſi, dove l' echo alberga.
Sempre nemica fu del noſtro regno,
E fù inventrice delle prime rime.

But I am ſatisfy'd, as I have long ſince declar'd, that ſuch an attempt wou'd never ſucceed in *France*, and it wou'd be rather a mark of weakneſs than good ſenſe, to endeavour to ſhake off a yoke which ſo many authors have borne, whoſe works will laſt as long as the nation itſelf. Our poetry has none of thoſe liberties which your's has; and this is perhaps one of the reaſons why the *Italians* got the ſtart of us, by three or four centuries, in this moſt difficult and moſt delightful art.

As I have endeavour'd to imitate you in tragedy, I ſhou'd be glad to follow your example in other branches of literature, for which you are ſo eminently diſtinguiſh'd: I cou'd wiſh to form my taſte by your's in the ſcience of hiſtory; I do not mean the empty barren knowledge of dates and facts, that only informs us at what period of time a man dy'd, who perhaps was a uſeleſs or a pernicious member of ſociety; the ſcience of a dictionary, that loads the memory without improving the mind: I mean that hiſtory of the human heart which teaches us men and manners, which leads us from error to error, and from prejudice to prejudice, into the effects of the various paſſions and affections that agitate mankind: which ſhews us all the evils that ignorance, or knowledge miſapply'd, have produced

duced in the world; and which, above all, gives us a clue to the progreſs of the arts, and follows them through the dangers of ſo many contending powers, and the ruin of ſo many empires.

It is this which makes hiſtory delightful; and it becomes ſtill more ſo to me, by the place which you will poſſeſs amongſt thoſe who have pleas'd and inſtructed mankind. It will raiſe the emulation of poſterity, to hear that your country has beſtow'd on you the moſt ſignal honours, that *Verona* has rais'd a ſtatue, with this inſcription, TO THE MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI IN HIS LIFE TIME. An inſcription as beautiful in its kind as that at Montpellier to LEWIS XIV. *after his death.*

Deign, ſir, to accept, with the reſpects of your fellow-citizens, thoſe of a ſtranger, who eſteems and honours you as much as if he had been born at *Verona.*

A LETTER FROM Mr. de la LINDELLE to Mr. de VOLTAIRE.

SIR,

YOU had the politeneſs to dedicate your tragedy of *Merope* to Mr. *Maffei*, and have ſerv'd the cauſe of literature both in *Italy* and *France*, by pointing out, from the perfect knowledge which you have of the theatre, the different rules and conduct of the *Italian* and *French* ſtages. The partial attachment which you have to every thing that comes from *Italy*, added to your particular regard for Mr. *Maffei*, would not permit you to cenſure the real faults of that excellent writer; but as I have myſelf nothing in view but truth, and the advancement of the arts, I ſhall not be afraid to ſpeak the ſentiments of the judicious public, and which I am ſatisfy'd muſt be your's alſo.

The Abbé *Desfontaines* had already remark'd ſome palpable errors in the *Merope* of Mr. *Maffei*; but, according to his uſual manner, with more rudeneſs than

juſtice:

juſtice: he has mingled a few good criticiſms with many bad ones. This ſatyriſt, ſo univerſally decry'd, had neither knowledge enough of the *Italian* tongue, nor taſte enough to form an equitable judgment.

This then is the opinion of the moſt judicious amongſt thoſe literati whom I have conſulted, both in *France* and on the other ſide of the *Alps*. *Merope* appears to every one of them, paſt diſpute, the moſt intereſting and truly tragic ſubject that was ever brought on the ſtage, infinitely beyond that of *Athaliah*; becauſe *Athaliah* does not want to aſſaſſinate the young king, but is deceiv'd by the High-Prieſt, who ſeeks revenge on her for her former crimes: whereas in *Merope* we ſee a mother, who, in revenging her ſon, is on the point of murthering that very ſon himſelf, her only deſire, and her only hope: the intereſt of *Merope* therefore affects us in a very different manner from that of *Athaliah*: but it ſeems as if Mr. *Maffei* was ſatisfy'd with what the ſubject naturally ſuggeſted to him, without making uſe of any theatrical art in the conduct of it.

1. The ſcenes in many places are not linked together, and the ſtage is left void; a fault which, in the preſent age, is looked upon as unpardonable, even in the loweſt claſs of dramatic writers.

2. The actors frequently come in and go out without reaſon; a fault no leſs conſiderable.

3. There is no probability, no dignity, no decorum, no art in the dialogue: in the very firſt ſcene we ſee a tyrant reaſoning in the calmeſt manner with *Merope*, whoſe huſband and children he had murthered, and making love to her: this wou'd have been hiſſed at *Paris*, even by the pooreſt judges.

4. Whilſt the tyrant is thus ridiculouſly making love to the old queen, word is brought that they have found a young man who had committed murder; but it does not appear through the whole courſe of the play who it was he had killed: he pretends it was a thief, who wanted to ſteal his cloaths. How low, little and poor is this? it would not be borne in a farce at a country fair.

5. The captain of the guard, provoſt, or whatever you call him, examines the murtherer, who has a fine ring upon his finger: this ſcene is quite low comedy, and the ſtyle is agreeable to it, and worthy of the ſcene.

6. The mother immediately ſuppoſes, that the robber, who was killed, is her ſon. It is pardonable, no doubt, in a mother to fear every thing; but a queen, who is a mother, ſhould have required better proofs.

7. In

7. In the midſt of all theſe fears, the tyrant *Polyphontes* reaſons with *Merope*'s waiting-woman about his pretended paſſion. Theſe cold and indecent ſcenes, which are only brought in to fill up the act, wou'd never be ſuffer'd on a regular ſtage. You have only, ſir, modeſtly taken notice of one of theſe ſcenes, where *Merope*'s woman deſires the tyrant not to haſten the nuptials; becauſe, ſhe ſays, her miſtreſs has *an attack of a fever:* but I, ſir, will boldly aver, in the name of all the critics, that ſuch a converſation, and ſuch an anſwer, are only fit for *Harlequin*'s theatre.

8. I will add moreover, that when the queen, imagining her ſon to be dead, tells us ſhe longs to pull the heart out of the murtherer's breaſt, and tear it with her teeth, ſhe talks more like a *Cannibal* than an afflicted mother; and that decency ſhou'd be preſerv'd in every thing.

9. *Ægiſthus*, who was brought in as a robber, and who had ſaid that he had himſelf been attacked, is taken for a thief a ſecond time, and carried before the queen, in ſpite of the king, who notwithſtanding undertakes to defend him. The queen binds him to a pillar, is going to kill him with a dart; but before ſhe throws it, aſks him ſome queſtions. *Ægiſthus* tells her, that his father is an old man, upon which the queen

immediately relents. Is not this an excellent reaſon for changing her mind, and imagining that *Ægiſthus* might be her own ſon? a moſt indiſputable mark to be ſure: is it ſo very extraordinary that a young man ſhou'd have an old father? *Maffei* has added this abſurdity, this deficiency of art and genius, to another even more ridiculous, which he had made in his firſt edition. *Ægiſthus* ſays to the queen, 'O *Polydore*, my father.' This *Polydore* was the very man to whom *Merope* had entruſted the care of *Ægiſthus*. At hearing the name of *Polydore*, the queen cou'd no longer doubt that *Ægiſthus* was her ſon: thus the piece was entirely at an end. This error was remov'd; but remov'd, we ſee, only to make room for a greater.

10. Whilſt the queen is thus ridiculouſly, and without any reaſon, in ſuſpence, occaſioned by the mention of an old man, the tyrant comes in, and takes *Ægiſthus* under his protection. The young man, who ſhou'd have been repreſented as a hero, thanks the king for his life, with a baſe and mean ſubmiſſion that is diſguſting, and entirely degrades the character of *Ægiſthus*.

11. At length *Merope* and the tyrant are left together: *Merope* exhauſts her reſentment in reproaches without end. Nothing can be more cold and lifeleſs

than

than theſe ſcenes, full of declamation, that have no plot, intereſt, or contraſted paſſion in them; they are ſchool-boys ſcenes: every thing in a play, that is without action, is uſeleſs.

12. There is ſo little art in this piece, that the author is always forced to employ confidants to fill up the ſtage. The fourth act begins with another cold and uſeleſs ſcene between the tyrant and the queen's waiting-woman; who, a little afterwards, lights, we know not how, on young *Ægiſthus*, and perſuades him to reſt himſelf in the porch, merely to give the queen a fair opportunity of diſpatching him when he falls aſleep; which he does according to promiſe. An excellent plot this! and then the queen comes a ſecond time, with an axe in her hand, in order to kill the young man, who is gone to ſleep for that purpoſe. This circumſtance, twice repeated, is ſurely the heighth of barrenneſs, as the young man's ſleep is the heighth of ridicule. Mr. *Maffei* thinks there is genius and variety in this repetition, becauſe the queen comes in the firſt time with a dart, and the ſecond with an axe. What a ſtrange effect of fancy!

13. At laſt old *Polydore* comes in *à propos*, and prevents the queen from ſtriking the blow. One wou'd naturally imagine, that this happy inſtant muſt pro-

duce a thousand affecting incidents between the mother and son; but we meet with nothing of this kind. *Ægisthus* flies off, and sees no more of his mother; he has not so much as one scene with her. This betrays a want of genius that is insupportable. *Merope* asks the old man what recompense he demands; and the old fool begs her to make him young again. In this manner the queen employs her time, which doubtless she shou'd have spent in running after her son: all this is low, ill-placed, and ridiculous to the last degree.

14. In the course of this piece the tyrant is always for espousing *Merope*; and, to compass his end, he bids her agents tell her, that he will murther all her servants, if she does not consent to give him her hand. What a ridiculous idea, and how extravagant a tyrant! Cou'd not Mr. *Maffei* have found out a more specious pretext to save the honour of a queen, who had meanness enough to marry the murtherer of her whole family?

15. Another childish college trick: the tyrant says to his confidant, 'I know the art of reigning; I'll 'put the bold and rebellious to death; give the reins 'to all kinds of vice; invite my subjects to commit 'the most atrocious crimes, and pardon the most 'guilty; expose the good to the fury of the wicked,

'&c.'

' &c.' Did ever man pronounce ſuch vile ſtuff? This declamation of a *regent of ſixtcen*, doth it not give us a fine idea of a man who knows how to govern? *Racine* was condemned for having made *Mathan* (in his *Athaliah)* ſay too much againſt himſelf; and yet *Mathan* talks reaſonably: but here it is to the laſt degree abſurd to pretend, that throwing every thing into confuſion is the art of ruling well; it is rather the art of dethroning himſelf. One cannot read any thing ſo ridiculous without laughing at it. Mr. *Maffei* is a ſtrange politician.

In a word, ſir, this work of *Maffei* is a fine ſubject, but a very bad performance. Every body at *Paris* agrees, that it wou'd not go through one repreſentation; and the ſenſible men in *Italy* have a very poor opinion of it. It is vain the author has taken ſo much pains in his travels, to engage the worſt writers he cou'd pick up to tranſlate his tragedy: it was much eaſier for him to pay a tranſlator, than to make his piece a good one.

THE

THE ANSWER OF Mr. de VOLTAIRE to Mr. de la LINDELLE.

SIR,

THE letter which you did me the honour to write to me entitles you to the name of *Hypercritic*, which was given to the famous *Scaliger*: you are truly a moſt redoubtable adverſary: if you treat Mr. *Maffei* in this manner, what am I to expect from you? I acknowledge that, in many points, you have too much reaſon on your ſide. You have taken a great deal of pains to rake together a heap of brambles and briars; but why wou'd you not enjoy the pleaſure of gathering a few flowers? there are certainly many in Mr. *Maffei*; and which, I dare affirm, will flouriſh for ever. Such are the ſcenes between the mother and ſon, and the narration of the cataſtrophe. I can't help thinking, that theſe ſtrokes are affecting and pathetic. You ſay, the ſubject alone makes all the beauty; but was it not the ſame ſubject

in

in other authors who have treated *Merope*? Why, with the ſame aſſiſtance, had they not the ſame ſucceſs? Does not this ſingle argument prove, that Mr. *Maffei* owes as much to his genius as to his ſubject?

To be plain with you, I think Mr. *Maffei* has ſhewn more art than myſelf, in the manner by which he has contrived to make *Merope* think that her ſon is the murtherer of her ſon. I cou'd not bring myſelf to make uſe of the ring as he did; becauſe, after the *royal ring* that *Boileau* laughs at in his ſatires, this circumſtance wou'd always appear too trifling on our ſtage. We muſt conform to the faſhions of our own age and nation; and, for the ſame reaſon, we ought not lightly to condemn thoſe of foreigners.

Neither Mr. *Maffei* nor I have ſufficiently explain'd the motives that ſhou'd ſo ſtrongly incline *Poliphontes* to eſpouſe the queen. This is, perhaps, a fault inherent in the ſubject; but I muſt own I think this fault very inconſiderable, when the circumſtances it produces are ſo intereſting. The grand point is to affect and draw tears from the ſpectators. Tears were ſhed both at *Verona* and at *Paris*. This is the beſt anſwer that can be made to the critics. It is impoſſible to be perfect; but how meritorious is it to move an audience, in ſpite of all our imperfections! Moſt certain

tain it is, that in *Italy* many things are paſſed over, which wou'd not be pardoned in *France:* firſt, becauſe taſte, decorum, and the ſtage itſelf, is not the ſame in both; ſecondly, becauſe the *Italians*, having no city where they repreſent dramatic pieces every day, cannot poſſibly be ſo uſed to things of this kind as ourſelves. *Opera*, that ſplendid monſter, has drove out *Melpomene* from among them; and there are ſo many of the *Caſtrati* there, that no room is left for *Roſcius* and *Æſopus:* but if ever the *Italians* ſhou'd have a regular theatre, I believe they wou'd ſoon get beyond us: their ſtages are more extenſive, their language more tractable, their blank verſes eaſier to be made, their nation poſſeſſed of more ſenſibility; but they want encouragement, peace, plenty, &c.

END of the THIRD VOLUME.